u27

843.91
Au27

WAYNE (NE) STATE COLLEGE
843.91 Au27 WStac
Marie-Claire / by Ma 09003387
3 5088 00123 7548

w.m.b

1792

MARIE-CLAIRE

MARGUERITE AUDOUX

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/marieclairetrans0000marg

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL
WEST VIRGINIA

MARIE-CLAIRE

BY

MARGUERITE AUDOUX

Translated by
JOHN N. RAPHAEL

With an Introduction
By ARNOLD BENNETT

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

Copyright, 1911,
By George H. Doran Company

INTRODUCTION TO

MARIE-CLAIRE

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

INTRODUCTION

THE origins of this extraordinary book are sufficiently curious and sufficiently interesting to be stated in detail. They go back to some ten years ago, when the author, after the rustic adventures which she describes in the following pages, had definitely settled in Paris as a working sempstress. The existence of a working sempstress in Paris, as elsewhere, is very hard; it usually means eleven hours' close application a day, six full days a week, at half a crown a day. But already Marguerite Audoux's defective eyesight was causing anxiety, and upsetting the regularity of her work, so that in the evenings she was often less fatigued than a sempstress generally is. She wanted distraction, and she found it in the realisation of an old desire to write. She wrote, not because she could find nothing else to do, but because at last the chance of writing had come. That she had always loved reading is plain from certain incidents in this present book; her

opportunities for reading, however, had been limited. She now began, in a tentative and perhaps desultory fashion, to set down her youthful reminiscences. About this time she became acquainted, through one of its members, and by one of those hazards of destiny which too rarely diversify the dull industrial life of a city, with a circle of young literary men, of whom possibly the most important was the regretted Charles Louis Philippe, author of "Bubu de Montparnasse," and other novels which have a genuine reputation among the chosen people who know the difference between literature and its counterfeit. This circle of friends used to meet at Philippe's flat. It included a number of talented writers, among whom I should mention MM. Iehl (the author of "Cauët"), Francis Jourdain, Paul Fargue, Larbaud, Chanvin, Marcel Ray, and Régis Gignoux (the literary and dramatic critic). Marguerite Audoux was not introduced as a literary prodigy. Nobody, indeed, was aware that she wrote. She came on her merits as an individuality, and she took her place beside several other women who, like herself, had no literary pretensions. I am told by one of the intimates of the fellowship that the impression she made was pro-

found. And the fact is indubitable that her friends are at least as enthusiastic about her individuality as about this book which she has written. She was a little over thirty, and very pretty, with an agreeable voice. The sobriety of her charm, the clear depth of her emotional faculty, and the breadth of her gentle interest in human nature handsomely conquered the entire fellowship. The working sempstress was sincerely esteemed by some of the brightest masculine intellects in Paris.

This admiring appreciation naturally encouraged her to speak a little of herself. And one evening she confessed that she, too, had been trying to write. On another evening she brought some sheets of manuscript—the draft of the early chapters of "Marie-Claire" —and read them aloud. She read, I am told, very well. The reception was enthusiastic. One can imagine the ecstatic fervour of these young men, startled by the apparition of such a shining talent. She must continue the writing of her book, but in the meantime she must produce some short stories and sketches for the daily papers! Her gift must be presented to the public instantly! She followed the advice thus urgently offered, and several members of the circle (in particular Régis Gignoux

and Marcel Ray) gave themselves up to the business of placing the stories and sketches; Marcel Ray devoted whole days to the effort, obtaining special leave from his own duties in order to do so. In the result several stories and sketches appeared in the *Matin, Paris Journal* (respectively the least and the most literary of Paris morning papers), and other organs. These stories, and sketches, by the way, were republished in a small volume, some time before "Marie-Claire," and attracted no general attention whatever.

Meanwhile the more important work proceeded, slowly; and was at length finished. Its composition stretched over a period of six years. Marguerite Audoux never hurried nor fatigued herself, and though she re-wrote many passages several times, she did not carry this revision to the meticulous excess which is the ruin of so many ardent literary beginners in France. The trite phrase, "written with blood and tears," does not in the least apply here. A native wisdom has invariably saved Marguerite Audoux from the dangerous extreme. In his preface to the original French edition, M. Octave Mirbeau appositely points out that Philippe and her other friends abstained from giving purely literary advice to

the authoress as her book grew and was read aloud. With the insight of artists they perceived that hers was a talent which must be strictly let alone. But Parisian rumour has alleged, not merely that she was advised, but that she was actually helped in the writing by her admirers. The rumour is worse than false—it is silly. Every paragraph of the work bears the unmistakable and inimitable work of one individuality. And among the friends of Marguerite Audoux, even the most gifted, there is none who could possibly have composed any of the passages which have been singled out as being beyond the accomplishment of a working sempstress. The whole work and every part of the work is the unassisted and untutored production of its author. This statement cannot be too clearly and positively made. Doubtless the spelling was drastically corrected by the proof-readers; but to have one's spelling drastically corrected is an experience which occurs to nearly all women writers, and to a few male writers.

The book completed, the question of its proper flotation arose. I use the word "flotation" with intent. Although Marguerite Audoux had originally no thought of publishing, her friends were firmly bent not sim-

ply on publishing, but on publishing with the maximum of éclat. A great name was necessary to the success of the enterprise, a name which, while keeping the sympathy of the artists, would impose itself on the crowd. Francis Jourdain knew Octave Mirbeau. And Octave Mirbeau, by virtue of his feverish artistic and moral enthusiasm, of his notorious generosity, and of his enormous vogue, was obviously the heaven-appointed man. Francis Jourdain went to Octave Mirbeau and offered him the privilege of floating "Marie-Claire" on the literary market of Paris. Octave Mirbeau accepted, and he went to work on the business as he goes to work on all his business; that is to say, with flames and lightnings. For some time Octave Mirbeau lived for nothing but "Marie-Claire." The result has been vastly creditable to him. "Marie-Claire" was finally launched in splendour. Its path had been prepared with really remarkable skill in the Press and in the world, and it was an exceedingly brilliant success from the start. It ran a triumphant course as a serial in one of the "great reviews," and within a few weeks of its publication as a book thirty thousand copies had been sold. The sale continues more

actively than ever. Marguerite Audoux lives precisely as she lived before. She is writing a further instalment of her pseudonymous autobiography, and there is no apparent reason why this new instalment should not be even better than the first.

Such is the story of the book.

My task is not to criticise the work. I will only say this. In my opinion it is highly distinguished of its kind (the second part in particular is full of marvellous beauty); but it must be accepted for what it is. It makes no sort of pretence to display those constructive and inventive artifices which are indispensable to a great masterpiece of impersonal fiction. It is not fiction. It is the exquisite expression of a temperament. It is a divine accident.

ARNOLD BENNETT.

MARIE-CLAIRE

ONE day a number of people came to the house. The men came in as though they were going into church, and the women made the sign of the cross as they went out.

I slipped into my parents' bedroom and was greatly surprised to see that my mother had a big lighted candle by her bedside. My father was leaning over the foot of the bed looking at my mother. She was asleep with her hands crossed on her breast.

Our neighbour, la mère Colas, kept us with her all day. As the women went out again she said to them, "No, she would not kiss her children good-bye." The women, looking at us, blew their noses, and la mère Colas added, "That sort of illness makes one unkind, I suppose." A few days afterwards we were given new dresses with big black and white checks.

La mère Colas used to give us our meals and send us out to play in the fields. My sister, who was a big girl, scrambled into the

hedges, climbed the trees, messed about in the ponds, and used to come home at night with her pockets full of creatures of all kinds, which frightened me and made la mère Colas furiously angry.

What I hated most were the earthworms. The red elastic things made me shiver with horror, and if I happened to step on one it made me quite ill. When I had a pain in my side la mère Colas used to forbid my sister to go out. But my sister got tired of remaining indoors and wanted to go out and take me with her. So she used to go and collect earthworms, and hold them up close to my face. Then I said that I wasn't in pain any more, and la mère Colas used to send us both out of doors. One day my sister threw a handful of earthworms on to my dress. I jumped back so quickly that I fell into a tub of hot water. La mère Colas was very angry while she undressed me. I was not very much hurt. She promised my sister a good slapping, and called to the sweeps, who were passing, to come in and take her away. All three of them came in, with their black bags and their ropes. My sister howled and cried for mercy. I was very much ashamed at being all undressed.

MY father often took us to a place where there were men who drank wine. He used to put me on a table among the glasses, and make me sing. The men would laugh and kiss me, and try and make me drink wine. It was always dark when we went home. My father took long steps, and rocked himself as he walked. He nearly tumbled down lots of times. Sometimes he would begin to cry and say that his house had been stolen. Then my sister used to scream. It was always she who used to find the house. One morning la mère Colas loaded us with reproaches, telling us that we were children of misfortune, and that she would not feed us any longer. We could go, she said, and look for our father, who had gone away, nobody knew where. When her anger had passed she gave us our breakfasts as usual, but a few days afterwards we were put into père Chicon's cart. The cart was full of straw and bags of corn. I was tucked away behind in a little hollow between the sacks. The cart

tipped down at the back, and every jolt made me slip on the straw.

I was very frightened all the way along. Every time I slipped I thought that the cart was going to drop me, or that the sacks were going to fall on me. We stopped at an inn. A woman lifted us down, shook the straw off our dresses, and gave us some milk to drink. While she was fondling us I heard her say to père Chicon, "You really think their father will take care of them, then?" Père Chicon shook his head, and knocked his pipe against the table. Then he made a funny face and said, "He may be anywhere. Young Girard told me he had met him on the Paris road." After a while père Chicon took us to a big house with a lot of steps leading up to the door. He had a long talk with a gentleman who waved his arms about and talked about the dignity of labour. The gentleman put his hand on my head and patted it, and I heard him say several times, "He did not tell me that he had any children." I understood that he was talking of my father, and I asked if I could see him. The gentleman looked at me without answering, and then asked père Chicon, "How old is she?" "About five," the old man replied. All this time my

sister was playing up and down the steps with a kitten. We went back in the cart to mère Colas again. She received us crossly and pushed us about. A few days afterwards she took us to the railway station, and that evening we went to a big house, where there were a lot of little girls.

Sister Gabrielle separated us at once. She said that my sister was big enough to be with the middle-sized girls, while I was to stay with the little ones. Sister Gabrielle was quite small, quite old, quite thin, and all bent up. She managed the dormitory and the refectory. She used to make the salad in a huge yellow jar. She tucked her sleeves up to her shoulders, and dipped her arms in and out of the salad. Her arms were dark and knotted, and when they came out of the jar, all shining and dripping, they made me think of dead branches on rainy days.

I MADE a chum at once. She came dancing up to me and looked impudent, I thought. She did not stand any higher than the bench on which I was sitting. She put her elbows on my knees and said: "Why aren't you playing about?" I told her that I had a pain in my side. "Oh, of course," she said, "your mother had consumption, and Sister Gabrielle said you would soon die." She climbed up on to the bench, and sat down, hiding her little legs under her. Then she asked me my name and my age, told me that her name was Ismérie, and that she was older than I was, and that the doctor said she would never get any bigger. She told me also that the class mistress was called Sister Marie-Aimée, and that she was very unkind, and punished you severely if you talked too much. All of a sudden she jumped down and shouted "Augustine." Her voice was like a boy's, and her legs were a little twisted. At the end of recreation I saw her on Augustine's back. Augustine was rolling her from one shoulder to the other, as if she meant to throw

her down. In passing me Ismérie called out in that big voice of hers, "You will carry me too sometimes, won't you?" I soon became friends with Augustine.

MY eyes were not well. At night my eyelids used to close up tight, and I was quite blind until I had them washed. Augustine was told off to take me to the infirmary. Every morning she used to come and fetch me to the little dormitory. I could hear her coming before she got to the door. She used to catch me by the hand and pull me along, and she didn't mind a bit when I bumped against the beds. We flew down the passages like the wind, and rushed down the two flights of stairs like an avalanche. My feet only touched a step now and again. I used to go down those stairs as if I was falling down a well. Augustine had strong hands and held me tight. To go to the infirmary we had to pass behind the chapel and then in front of a little white house. There we hurried more than ever. One day when I fell on to my knees, she pulled me up again and smacked my head, saying, "Do be quick, we are in front of the dead house." After that she was always afraid of my falling again, and used to tell me when we got in front of

the dead house. I was frightened chiefly because Augustine was frightened. If she rushed along like that there must be danger. I was always out of breath when I got to the infirmary. Somebody pushed me on to a little chair, and the pain in my side had been gone a long time when they came and washed my eyes. It was Augustine who took me into Sister Marie-Aimée's classroom. She put on a timid kind of voice, and said, "Sister, here is a new girl." I expected to be scolded; but Sister Marie-Aimée smiled, kissed me several times, and said, "You are too small to sit on a bench, I shall put you in here." And she sat me down on a stool in the hollow of her desk. It was ever so comfortable; the warmth of her woollen petticoat soothed my body, which was bruised all over by tumbling about on the wooden and stone staircases. Often two feet hemmed me in on each side of my stool, and two warm legs made a back for me. A groping hand pressed my head on to the woollen skirt between the knees, and the softness of the hand and the warmth of the pillow used to send me to sleep. When I woke up again the pillow became a table. The same hand put bits of cake on it and morsels of sugar and sweets sometimes. And all

round me I heard the world living. A voice with tears in it would say, "No, Sister, I didn't do it." Then shrill voices would say, "Yes, she did, Sister." Above my head a full warm voice called for silence. Then there would be a rap of a ruler on the desk. It would make an enormous noise down in my hollow. Sometimes the feet would be drawn away from my little stool, the knees would be drawn together, the chair would move, and I would see coming down to my nest a white veil, a narrow chin, smiling lips with little white pointed teeth behind them, and last of all two eyes which seemed to cuddle me and make me feel comfortable.

WHEN my eyes got better I used to get an alphabet as well as sweets and cakes. It was a little book with pictures next to the words. I often used to look at a great big strawberry which I fancied as big as a bun. When it was not cold in the classroom, Sister Marie-Aimée put me on a bench between Ismérie and Marie Renaud, who slept in the two beds next to mine. Now and then she used to let me go back to my hollow again, and I loved that. I used to find books there with pictures, which made me forget all about the time.

One morning Ismérie took me into a corner, and told me with great secrecy that Sister Marie-Aimée was not going to take the class any more because she was going to take Sister Gabrielle's place in the dormitory and the refectory. She did not tell me who had told her this, but she was very grieved about it. She was very fond of Sister Gabrielle, who used to treat her like a little child. She did not like "that Sister Marie-Aimée," as she used to call her when she knew that nobody heard

her but ourselves. She said that Sister Marie-Aimée would not let her climb on to our backs, and that we should not be able to make fun of her as we used to of Sister Gabrielle, who always went upstairs sideways. In the evening after prayers Sister Gabrielle told us that she was going. She kissed us all, beginning with the smallest of us. We went up to the dormitory making a dreadful noise. The big girls whispered together and said they would not put up with Sister Marie-Aimée. The little ones snivelled as though they were going into danger. Ismérie, whom I was carrying upstairs on my back, was crying noisily. Her little fingers strangled me, and her tears fell down my neck. Nobody thought of laughing at Sister Gabrielle, who went upstairs slowly, saying, "Hush, hush," all the time, without making the noise any less. The servant in the dormitory was crying too. She shook me a little while she was undressing me and said, "I'm sure you are pleased at having that Sister Marie-Aimée of yours." We used to call the servant Bonne Esther. I liked her best of the three servants. She was rather rough sometimes, but she was fond of us. In the night she would waken those who had unfortunate habits that they might be spared the

cane in the morning. When I coughed she used to get up and put a piece of sugar in my mouth. And often she took me out of my bed when I was cold, and warmed me in her own.

NEXT morning we went down to the refectory in dead silence. The servants told us to remain standing. Several of the big girls stood very straight and looked proud. Bonne Justine stood at one end of the table. She looked sad and bent her head. Bonne Néron, who looked like a gendarme, walked up and down in the middle of the refectory. Now and then she looked at the clock, and shrugged her shoulders. Sister Marie-Aimée came in, leaving the door open behind her. She seemed to me to be bigger than usual, in her white apron and white cuffs. She walked slowly, looking at us all. The rosary, which hung at her side, made a little clickety sound, and her skirt swung slightly as she walked. She went up the three steps to her desk, and made a sign to us to sit down. In the afternoon she took us out for a walk in the country. It was very hot. I went and sat down near her on a little hillock. She was reading a book, and every now and then looked at the little girls who were playing in a field below us. She looked at the sun which

was setting, and kept on saying, "How lovely it is, how lovely it is."

That evening the birch which Sister Gabrielle kept in the dormitory was put away in a cupboard, and in the refectory the salad was turned with two long wooden spoons. These were the only changes. We went into class from nine o'clock till twelve, and in the afternoon we cracked nuts, which were sold to an oil merchant. The bigger girls used to crack them with a hammer, and the little ones took them out of the shells. We were forbidden to eat them, and it wasn't at all easy. One of the girls would always sneak if we did, because she was greedy too, and jealous. Bonne Esther used to peep into our mouths. Sometimes she caught a very greedy girl. Then she used to roll her eyes at her, give her a little smack, and say, "I've got my eye on you." Some of us she trusted. She would make us turn round and open our mouths and pretend to look at them, and then she said, "Shut your beaks, birdies," and laughed.

I often wanted to eat the nuts. But I would look at Bonne Esther and blush at the idea of cheating her, because she trusted me. But after a time I wanted to eat nuts so badly that I could not think of anything else. Every

day I tried to think of some way of eating them without being caught. I tried to slip some into my sleeves, but I was so awkward that I always dropped them. Besides, I wanted to eat a lot of them, a great big lot. I thought I should like to eat a sackful. One day I managed to steal some. Bonne Esther, who was taking us up to bed, slipped on a nutshell and dropped her lantern, which went out. I was close to a big bowl of nuts, and I took a handful and put them in my pocket. As soon as everybody was in bed I took the nuts out of my pocket, put my head under the sheets and crammed them into my mouth. But it seemed to me at once as though everybody in the dormitory must hear the noise that my jaws were making. I did all I could to munch slowly and quietly, but the noise thumped in my ears like the blows of a mallet.

Bonne Esther got up, lit the lamp, stooped down and looked under the beds. When she came to mine I looked out at her trembling. She whispered, "Aren't you asleep yet?" and went on looking. She went down to the end of the dormitory, opened the door, and closed it again; but she was hardly back in bed with the light out before the latch of the door made a little sound as though somebody were open-

ing it. Bonne Esther lit her lamp again and said, "Whatever is it? It cannot be the cat opening the door by itself." It seemed to me that she was afraid. I heard her moving about in her bed, and all of a sudden she called out "Oh dear, oh dear." Ismérie asked her what the matter was. She said that a hand had opened the door, and she had felt a breath on her face. In the twi-darkness we saw the door half open. I was very frightened. I thought it was the devil who had come to fetch me. We waited a long, long time, but we heard nothing more. Bonne Esther asked if one of us would get up and put the light out, although it was not very far from her own bed. Nobody answered. Then she called me. I got up and she said, "You are such a good little girl that ghosts won't do any harm to you." She put her head under the bedclothes, and I blew the lamp out. And directly it was put out I saw thousands of shining specks of light, and felt something cold on my cheeks. I was sure that there were green dragons, with mouths aflame, under the beds. I could feel their claws on my feet, and lights were jumping about on each side of my head. I wanted to sit down, and when I got to my bed I was quite sure that my two feet had gone. When

I dared, I stooped down and felt for them. They were very cold. I went to sleep at last holding them in my two hands.

In the morning Bonne Esther found the cat on a bed near the door. She had had kittens during the night. When Sister Marie-Aimée was told about it, she said that the cat had certainly opened the door by jumping at the latch. But we never felt sure about that, and the little girls used to talk about it in low voices for a long time.

NEXT week all the girls who were eight years old went down to the big dormitory. I had a bed near the window, quite close to Sister Marie-Aimée's room. Marie Renaud and Ismérie again had their beds on each side of me. When we were in bed Sister Marie-Aimée often used to come and sit by me. She would take one of my hands and pat it, and look out of the window. One night there was a big fire in the neighbourhood, and the whole dormitory was lit up. Sister Marie-Aimée opened the window wide, shook me and said, "Wake up, come and see the fire." She took me in her arms, passed her hands over my face to wake me, and said again, "Come and see the fire; see how beautiful it is." I was so sleepy that I let my head fall on her shoulder. Then she boxed my ears, and called me a little silly, and I woke up and began to cry. She took me in her arms again, sat down, and rocked me, holding me close to her. She bent her head forward towards the window. Her face looked transparent, and her eyes were full of light. Is-

mérie hated Sister Marie-Aimée to come to the window. It prevented her from talking, and she always had something to say. Her voice was so loud that one heard it at the other end of the dormitory. Sister Marie-Aimée used to say, "There's Ismérie talking again"; and Ismérie used to answer, "There's Sister Marie-Aimée scolding again." Her daring frightened me, but Sister Marie-Aimée used to pretend not to hear her. But one day she said, "I forbid you to answer me, little dwarf." Ismérie answered "Nosums." This was a word which we had made up ourselves. It meant "Look at my nose and see if I care." Sister Marie-Aimée reached for the cane. I was dreadfully afraid she was going to whip Ismérie. But Ismérie threw herself down flat on her stomach and wriggled about and made funny noises. Sister Marie-Aimée pushed her away with her foot in disgust, threw the cane away, and said, "Oh, you horrible little thing!" Afterwards I noticed that she used to avoid looking at her, and never seemed to hear the rude things she said. But she forbade us to carry her about on our backs.

That never prevented Ismérie from climbing on to mine like a monkey. I hadn't the courage to push her away, and I used to stoop

down a little to let her get well up. She always wanted to ride when we went up to the dormitory. It was very hard for her to get up the stairs. She used to laugh about it herself, saying that she hopped up like an old hen going to roost. As Sister Marie-Aimée always went upstairs first, I used to wait and go up among the last girls. But sometimes Sister Marie-Aimée would turn round suddenly. Then Ismérie slipped down my body to the ground with wonderful quickness and skill. I always felt a little bit awkward when I caught Sister Marie-Aimée's eye, and Ismérie always said, "See what a fool you are. You were caught again." Marie Renaud would never let her climb up on to her back. She used to say that she wore her dress out and made it dirty.

ISMÉRIE was a little chatterbox, but Marie Renaud hardly ever talked at all. Every morning she used to help me to make my bed. She would pass her hands over the sheets to smooth them out, and always refused my help in making her bed, because she said I rolled the sheets all kinds of ways. I never could understand why her bed was so smooth when she got up. One day she told me that she pinned her sheets and her blankets to the mattress. She had all kinds of little hiding places full of all kinds of things. At table she always used to eat some of yesterday's dessert. The dessert of the day went into her pocket. She used to finger it there, and would munch a little bit of it from time to time. I often found her sitting in corners making lace with a pin. Her great pleasure was brushing, folding, and putting things in order. That was why my shoes were always well brushed and my Sunday dress carefully folded. But one day a new servant came, whose name was Madeleine. She soon found out that I did not take care of my own things.

She got excited, and said I was a great big lazy girl, and that I made other people wait on me as though I were a countess. She said it was a shame to make poor little Marie Renaud work. Bonne Néron agreed with her, and said I was puffed up with pride, that I thought I was better than anybody else, that I never did anything like other girls. They both said, together, that they had never seen a girl like me, and both of them leaned over me and shouted at me together. They made me think of two noisy fairies, a black one and a white one. Madeleine was fresh and fair, with full open lips, and teeth which were wide apart. Her tongue was broad and thick, and moved about into the corners of her mouth when she talked. Bonne Néron raised her hand to me, and said, "Drop your eyes this minute!" As they went away, I heard her say to Madeleine: "She makes you ashamed of yourself when she looks at you like that." I had known for a long time that Bonne Néron looked like a bull, but I could not find out what animal Madeleine resembled. I thought it over for several days, thinking of all the animals I knew, and at last I gave it up. She was fat, and her hips swayed when she walked. She had a piercing voice, which

surprised everybody. She asked leave to sing in church, but as she did not know the hymns, Sister Marie-Aimée told me to teach her. After that Marie Renaud was allowed to brush and smooth out my things without anybody taking any notice of it. She was so pleased that she gave me a safety-pin as a present, so as to fasten up my handkerchief, which I was always losing. Two days later I lost both the safety-pin and the handkerchief. Oh, that handkerchief! It was a perfect nightmare! I used to lose one regularly every week. Sister Marie-Aimée gave us a clean pocket-handkerchief in return for the dirty one which we had to throw down on to the ground in front of her. I never thought of mine till the last moment. And then I turned out all my pockets, and ran about like a mad thing, into the dormitory, up and down the passages, and up to the garret hunting for it everywhere. Oh dear, oh dear! if I could only find a handkerchief somewhere! As I passed in front of the picture of the Virgin, I would put my hands together and pray fervently, "Admirable Mother, make me find a handkerchief." But I never did find one, and I went downstairs again red in the face, out of breath, feeling dreadfully unhappy, and not daring to take

the clean handkerchief which Sister Marie-Aimée handed to me. Before she spoke, I could hear the scolding which I knew I deserved. And even when Sister Marie-Aimée said nothing at all I could see her frown, and her eyes looked crossly at me and followed me about. I felt crushed with shame, so crushed that I could scarcely lift my feet. I tried to hide in the corners as I walked; and, in spite of it all, next time I had lost my handkerchief again. Madeleine used to look at me with sham compassion. But she could not always prevent herself from telling me that I deserved to be punished severely. She seemed very fond of Sister Marie-Aimée. She waited on her always, and she would burst into tears at her slightest word. Then Sister Marie-Aimée had to soothe her by patting her cheeks, and she would laugh and cry at the same time, and move her shoulders about, showing her white neck. Bonne Néron used to say that she looked like a cat.

BONNE NÉRON left one day after a scene in the middle of luncheon. It happened during a dead silence. All of a sudden she shouted out, "Yes; I want to go, and I am going!" Sister Marie-Aimée looked at her in astonishment, and Bonne Néron faced her, putting her head down, shaking it, butting at her almost, and shouting all the time that she would not be ordered about by a bit of a baby. She walked backwards as she shouted, got to the door, and pulled it open. Before she went out of the room she threw one of her long arms out at Sister Marie-Aimée, and shrieked, "She isn't even twenty-five!" Some of the little girls were frightened, others burst out laughing. Madeleine got quite hysterical. She threw herself on to the floor at Sister Marie-Aimée's knees, kissing her dress, and winding her arms round her legs. She got hold of her two hands and mumbled over them with her big, moist mouth, screaming all the time as though some terrible catastrophe had happened. Sister Marie-Aimée could not shake her off. At

last she got angry. Then Madeleine fainted, and fell on her back. As she was undoing her Sister Marie-Aimée made a sign towards the part of the room where I was. Thinking she wanted me, I ran to her; but she sent me back again. "No; not you. Marie Renaud," she said. She gave her keys to Marie, and, although she had never been in Sister Marie-Aimée's room, she found the bottle of salts which Sister Marie-Aimée wanted without any loss of time.

MADELEINE soon got better, and took Bonne Néron's place. She got more authority over us. She was still timid and submissive to Sister Marie-Aimée, but she made up for that by shouting at us, for any reason and no reason, that she was "there to look after us," and was "not our servant." The day she fainted I had seen her bosom. I had never dreamt of anything so beautiful. But she was a stupid girl, and I never minded what she said to me. That used to make her very angry. She used to say all kinds of rude things to me, and always finished up by calling me "Miss Princess." She could not forgive me for Sister Marie-Aimée's affection for me, and whenever she saw the Sister kissing me she got quite red with annoyance.

I began to grow, and my health was pretty good. Sister Marie-Aimée said that she was proud of me. She used to squeeze me so tight when she kissed me that she sometimes hurt me. Then she would say, putting her fingers on my forehead, "My little girl; my little child." During recreation I often used to sit

near her, and listen to her reading. She read in a deep voice, and when the people in the book displeased her more than usual, she used to shut it up violently, and come and play games with us.

She wanted me to be quite faultless. She would say: "I want you to be perfect. Do you hear, child? Perfect." One day she thought I had told a lie. There were three cows which used to graze on some land in the middle of which was a great big chestnut tree. The white cow was wicked, and we were afraid of it, because it had knocked a little girl down once. That day I saw the two red cows, and just under the chestnut tree I saw a big black cow. I said to Ismérie: "Look; the white cow has been sent away because she was wicked, I expect." Ismérie, who was cross that day, screamed, and said that I was always laughing at the others, and trying to make them believe things which were not true. I showed her the cow. She said it was a white one. I said, "No, it is a black one." Sister Marie-Aimée heard us. She was very angry, and said, "How dare you say that the cow is black?" Then the cow moved. She looked black and white now, and I understood that I had made a mistake because of the

shadow of the chestnut tree. I was so surprised that I could not find anything to say. I did not know how to explain it. Sister Marie-Aimée shook me. "Why did you tell a lie?" she said. I answered that I did not know. She sent me into a corner in the shed, and told me that I should have nothing but bread and water that day. As I had not told a lie, the punishment did not worry me. The shed had a lot of old cupboards in it, and some garden tools. I climbed from one thing on to the other, and got right up and sat on the top of the highest cupboard. I was ten years old, and it was the first time that I had ever been alone. I felt pleased at this. I sat there, swinging my legs, and began to imagine a whole invisible world. The old cupboard with rusty locks became the entrance gate to a magnificent palace. I was a little girl who had been left on the top of a mountain. A beautiful lady dressed like a fairy had seen me up there and had come to fetch me. Three or four lovely ducks ran in front of her. They had just come up to me when I saw Sister Marie-Aimée standing in front of the cupboard with the rusty locks and looking about for me everywhere. I did not know that I was sitting on the cupboard. I still believed

myself to be on the top of the mountain, and I felt cross because Sister Marie-Aimée's arrival had made the palace and the lovely lady disappear. She saw my legs swinging, and just as she saw me I remembered that I was sitting on the cupboard. She stood there for a moment looking up at me. Then she took a piece of bread, a piece of sausage, and a little bottle of wine out of the pocket of her dress, showed me one thing after the other, and in an angry voice said, "This *was* for you. There!" And she put it all back into her pocket and went away. A moment afterwards Madeleine brought me some bread and water, and I remained in the shed till evening.

SISTER MARIE-AIMÉE had been growing sadder and sadder for some time. She never played with us any more, and often she used to forget our dinner time. Madeleine would send me to the chapel to fetch her, and I would find her there on her knees with her face hidden in her hands. I had to pull at her dress before she took any notice of me. Often I thought that she had been crying, but I never dared to look at her closely for fear she would get angry. She seemed to be lost in thought, and when we spoke to her, she answered "Yes" or "No" quite sharply.

But she took a great interest in the little feast which we had at Easter every year. She had the cakes brought in, and we put them on a table and covered them with a white cloth, so that the greedy girls should not see them all at the same time. On feast days we were allowed to talk as much as we liked at table, and we made a tremendous noise. Sister Marie-Aimée waited on us with a smile and a word for each of us. That day she was going

to serve the cakes, and Madeleine, who was helping her, was taking off the cloth which covered them. Then a cat, which had been under the cloth, jumped down and ran away. Sister Marie-Aimée and Madeleine both said "Oh," and Madeleine said, "The dirty beast has been nibbling all the cakes." Sister Marie-Aimée did not like the cat. She stood perfectly still for a minute, then ran to the corner, took a stick and ran after it. It was horrible. The cat was frightened out of its wits, and jumped this way and that out of the way of the stick with which Sister Marie-Aimée kept hitting the benches and the walls. All the little girls were frightened, and ran towards the door. Sister Marie-Aimée stopped them. "Nobody is to go out," she said. I hardly knew her. Her lips were pressed together, her cheeks were as white as her cap, and her eyes, which seemed to flame, frightened me so that I hid my face in the hollow of my arm. I did not want to do so, but I soon looked up again. The cat hunt was still going on. Sister Marie-Aimée, with her stick in the air, ran after the cat without saying a word. Her lips were open, and I could see her little pointed teeth. She ran about, jumping over the benches, and climbed

up on to the table, lifting her petticoats as she did so. When she was going to hit the cat it jumped and ran up a curtain right on to the top of the window. Madeleine, who had been following Sister Marie-Aimée about, wanted to go and fetch a longer stick, but Sister Marie-Aimée stopped her, and said, "It is lucky to have got away." Bonne Justine, who was standing near me, hid her eyes and murmured, "Oh, it is shameful, shameful!" and I thought it was shameful, too. I felt as though Sister Marie-Aimée had grown smaller. I had always thought her quite faultless. I compared this scene with another one, which had happened one day when there was a big thunder-storm. That day Sister Marie-Aimée had been wonderful. While she was chasing the cat I could see her, that other day, as she stood on a bench, and closed the windows quietly, lifting her lovely arms. Her wide sleeves fell down on her shoulders, and while we shivered and shook in terror at the lightning and the buffeting of the wind she said quietly, "It is quite a hurricane." Sister Marie-Aimée made the little girls stand on the other side of the room. She opened the door wide, and the cat rushed out.

ONE afternoon I was surprised to see that it was not our old priest who was saying vespers. This one was a tall, fine man. He sang with a strong, jerky voice. We talked about him all the evening. Madeleine said he was a handsome man, and Sister Marie-Aimée thought, she said, that he had a young voice, but that he pronounced his words like an old man, and that he was distinguished looking. When he came to pay us a visit two or three days afterwards, I saw that he had white hair in little curls round his neck, and that his eyes and his eyebrows were very black. He asked for those of us who were preparing their catechism, and wanted to know everybody's name. Sister Marie-Aimée answered for me. She put her hand on my head and said, "This is our Marie-Claire." When Ismérie came up in her turn he looked at her in surprise, and made her turn round and walk for him to see. He said that she was no bigger than a child of three, and when he asked Sister Marie-Aimée if she was intelligent, Ismérie turned round sharply and

said that she was not as stupid as the rest of us. He burst out laughing, and I saw that his teeth were very white. When he spoke he jerked himself forward as though he wanted to catch his words again. They seemed to drop out of his mouth in spite of himself. Sister Marie-Aimée took him as far as the gate of the courtyard. She never used to take any visitors farther than the door of the room. She came back, climbed up to her desk again, and after a moment she said, without looking at anybody, "He really is a very distinguished man."

Our new priest lived in a little house near the chapel. In the evening he used to walk in the avenue of linden trees. He often passed close to the playground where we were playing, and he always used to bow very low to Sister Marie-Aimée. Every Thursday afternoon he came to see us. He sat down, leaning against the back of his chair, and crossing his legs, told us stories. He was very pleasant, and Sister Marie-Aimée used to say that he laughed as though he enjoyed it. Sometimes Sister Marie-Aimée was ill. Then he used to go up and see her in her room. We would see Madeleine passing with a teapot and two cups. She was red in the face and very busy.

When the summer was over, M. le Curé came to see us after dinner and spent the evenings with us. When nine o'clock struck he used to go, and Sister Marie-Aimée always went with him down the passage to the big front door.

HE had been with us for a year, and I could never get used to making confession to him. He often used to look at me and laugh in a way that made me think that he remembered my faults. We went to confession on fixed days. Each one of us took her turn. When there were only one or two to go in before me I began to tremble. My heart beat dreadfully fast, and I got cramp in my stomach, which prevented me from breathing properly. When my turn came I got up and felt my legs trembling under me. My head buzzed, and my cheeks turned cold. I fell on my knees in the confessional and M. le Curé's voice, which sounded as though it came from a long way off, gave me confidence. But he always had to help me to remember my faults. If he hadn't, I should have forgotten half of them. At the end of confession he always asked me what my name was. I longed to tell him another name, but while I was wondering if I dare, my own name used to slip out of my mouth.

It was getting near the time for our Communion. It was to be in May, and preparations for it were beginning. Sister Marie-Aimée composed some new hymns. She had made one, which was a sort of thanksgiving for M. le Curé. A fortnight before the ceremony they separated us from the others. We had prayed all day long. Madeleine was supposed to see that we were not disturbed at prayer, but she often used to disturb us herself by quarrelling with one of us. My fellow communicant was called Sophie. She was a quiet little girl, and we always kept out of the quarrels. We used to talk over serious matters. I often told her how much I hated confession, and how frightened I was that I should pass through my communion badly. She was very good, and she did not understand what I had to be afraid of. She thought that I was not pious enough, and she had noticed that I used to go to sleep during prayers. She confessed to me that she was very frightened of death. She used to talk about it in a low voice, and looked very frightened. Her eyes were green, and her hair was so lovely that Sister Marie-Aimée would never have it cut short like that of the other girls.

At last the great day came. My general

confession had passed off all right. It gave me the same feeling that a bath does. I felt very clean after it, but I trembled so when I was given the holy wafer that a bit of it stuck in my teeth. A sort of dizziness came over me, and I felt as though a big black curtain had dropped in front of my eyes. I thought I heard Sister Marie-Aimée's voice asking "Are you ill," and I seemed to know that she went with me as far as my prie-dieu, and that she put my taper into my hand and said "Hold it tight." My throat had grown so tight that I could not swallow, and I felt a liquid dropping from my mouth into my throat. Then I was wildly frightened, for Madeleine had warned us repeatedly that if we bit the holy wafer the blood of Christ would trickle from our mouths, and that nobody would be able to stop it. Sister Marie-Aimée wiped my face and whispered quite low, "Take care, dear. Are you ill?" My throat loosened, and I quickly swallowed the wafer. Then at last I dared to look down to see the blood on my dress, but I saw only a little grey spot like a drop of water. I put my handkerchief to my lips and wiped my tongue. There was not a particle of blood on it. I did not feel quite sure yet, but when we got up to sing I tried

to sing with the others. When M. le Curé came to see us later in the day Sister Marie-Aimée told him that I had almost fainted at Communion. He took my chin in his hand and tipped my face up towards him. Then, after looking into my eyes, he began to laugh, and said that I was a very sensitive little girl.

AFTER our first communion we did not attend class any more. Bonne Justine taught us to sew. We made caps for peasant women. It was not very difficult, and as it was something new I worked hard. Bonne Justine said that I should make a very good needle-woman. Sister Marie-Aimée used to kiss me and say, "So you would, if you could only get over your laziness." But when I had made a few caps and had to go on doing the same thing over and over again, my laziness got the better of me. The work bored me, and I could not make up my mind to do it. I could have remained for hours and hours without moving, watching the others work. Marie Renaud never spoke to us while she was sewing. Her stitches were so small and so close together that one needed good eyes to see them. Ismérie sang all the time she sewed, and nobody ever scolded her. Some of the girls sewed with bent backs and a frown on their foreheads. Their fingers were moist, and their needles squeaked. Others sewed slowly and carefully, without

getting tired or bored, counting their stitches under their breath. That is the way I should have liked to sew. I used to growl at myself for not doing so, and then I used to imitate them for a few minutes. But the least sound disturbed me, and I would stop and listen, or look at what was going on all round me. Madeleine said that my nose was always in the air. I spent most of my time imagining needles which would sew all by themselves. For a long time I hoped that an old woman, whom nobody would see but I, would come out of the big fireplace and sew my cap for me very quickly. At last I took no notice of Sister Marie-Aimée's scolding, and she didn't know what to do to make me work. One day she decided that I was to read aloud twice a day. It was a great joy for me. The time to begin reading never seemed to come quickly enough, and I was always sorry when I closed the book.

WHEN I had finished reading Sister Marie-Aimée used to make Colette the cripple sing to us. She always sang the same songs, but her voice was so lovely that we never got tired of listening to it. She sang quite simply, without stopping her work, and she kept time with her head as she sang. Bonne Justine, who knew all about everybody, told us that Colette had been brought in with both legs broken, when she was quite a tiny child. She was twenty now. She walked laboriously, helping herself with two sticks; she would never use crutches because she was afraid of looking like an old woman. During recreation I always used to see her alone on a bench. She kept on throwing herself back and stretching. Her dark eyes had such big pupils that one hardly saw the whites at all. I felt drawn towards her. I should have liked to have been her friend. She seemed very proud, and whenever I did any little thing for her she had a way of saying, "Thank you, little one," which made me remember that I was only twelve

years old. Madeleine told me, mysteriously, that we were not allowed to talk to Colette alone, and when I wanted to know why, she reeled out a long complicated story which told me nothing at all. I asked Bonne Justine, who used a lot of words which I didn't understand, but told me that a little girl like me must not be alone with Colette. I could never understand why. I noticed that every time one of the big girls gave her her arm to help her to walk about a little, three or four other girls always came up and talked and laughed with them. I thought that she had no friends. A feeling of great pity drew me to her, and one day when she was all alone I asked her to take my arm for a little walk. I was standing in front of her timidly, but I knew that she would not refuse. She looked at me and said, "You know it is not allowed." I nodded "Yes." She looked at me again. "Aren't you afraid of being punished?" she said. I shook my head to say "No." I wanted to cry and it made my throat feel tight. I helped her to get up. She leaned on her stick with one hand and put all her weight on my shoulder. I could see how difficult it was for her to walk. She did not say a word to me while we were walking, and when I had

taken her back to her bench she looked at me and said, "Thank you, Marie-Claire." When she saw me with Colette, Bonne Justine raised her arms to heaven and made the sign of the cross. At the other end of the playground Madeleine shook her fist at me and shouted.

WHEN evening came I saw that Sister Marie-Aimée knew what I had done, but she never said a word of blame. At recreation next day she drew me towards her, took my head in her two hands and bent towards me. She didn't say anything to me, but her eyes plunged right into my face. I felt as though I were wrapped up in her eyes. I felt as though a soft warmth was all round me, and I felt comfortable. She gave me a long kiss on the forehead, then smiled at me and said, "There. You are my beautiful white lily." I thought her so beautiful, and her eyes shone so with several colours in them, that I said to her, "And you, too, mother; you are a lovely flower." She said in an off-hand way, "Yes; but I don't count among the lilies now." Then she asked almost roughly, "Don't you love Ismérie any more?" "Yes, mother." "Really. Then what about Colette?" "I love Colette too." "Oh, you love everybody!" she said.

I USED to give Colette my arm nearly every day. She never talked to me much, and then only about the other girls. When I sat down next to her she used to look at me curiously. She said she thought I was a queer little thing. One day she asked me if I thought her pretty. Directly she said it, I remembered that Sister Marie-Aimée said that she was as black as a mole. I saw, however, that she had a broad forehead, fine big eyes, and the rest of her face was small and refined. Whenever I looked at her, I didn't quite know why, but I thought of a well, deep and dark, and full of hot water. No, I didn't think her pretty, but I wouldn't tell her so because she was a cripple. I said she would be much prettier if her skin were whiter. Little by little I became her friend. She told me that she hoped to go away and get married like Nina had done. Nina used to come and see us on Sundays with her child. Colette took hold of my arm and said, "You see, I must get married. I must." Then she stretched herself, bending her whole body for-

ward. Sometimes she used to cry, and was in such deep trouble that I could not find anything to say to her. She would look at her poor twisted legs, and groan out, "There would have to be a miracle for me to get away from here."

All of a sudden I got the idea that the Virgin could bring this miracle about. Colette thought it a splendid idea. She was quite surprised that she had never dreamed of it. It was only fair that she should have legs like the others. She wanted to see about it at once. She explained to me that several girls would be necessary for the nine days' prayer, and said that we must go and purify ourselves at communion, and that during nine days we would pray all the time, so as to get help from Our Lady in heaven. This had to be done in the greatest secrecy. It was arranged that my friend Sophie should be one of us because she was so very religious, and Colette said she would talk to some of the big girls who were good, too. Two days afterwards it was all arranged. Colette was to fast during the nine days. On the tenth day, which would be a Sunday, she would go to communion as usual, leaning on her stick and the arm of one of us. Then, when she had taken the holy wafer,

she would make a vow to bring up her children in the love of the Virgin, and after that she would rise up straight and would sing the "Te Deum" in her beautiful voice, and we would all sing it with her.

For nine days I prayed with more fervour than I had ever prayed before. The ordinary prayers seemed insipid. I recited the Virgin's Litany. I hunted up the most beautiful hymns of praise that I could find, and repeated them without getting tired. "Star of the Morning, make Colette whole." The first time, I remained on my knees for so long that Sister Marie-Aimée scolded me. Nobody noticed the little signs which we made to one another, and the nine days of prayer passed off without any one knowing anything about them.

COLETTE was very pale when she came to mass. Her cheeks were thinner than ever, and she stood with her eyes cast down. Her eyelids were deep violet. I thought to myself that the end of her martyrdom had come, and I was filled with a deep joy. Quite close to me, the picture of the Virgin in a flowing white robe smiled as it looked at me, and in an outburst of all my faith my thoughts cried out, "Oh, Mirror of Justice, make Colette whole." My temples were stretched tightly. I was straining every nerve to keep my thoughts from wandering, and I went on saying, "Oh, Mirror of Justice, make Colette whole!" Colette went up to the communion table. Her stick made a little clickety noise on the flagstones. When she was on her knees the girl who had gone up to the table with her came back to us with the stick. She knew that it would be of no further use.

Colette tried to get up, and fell back again on to her knees. Her hand groped after her stick, and when she didn't find it by her side,

she tried again to raise herself without it. She clung to the Holy Table and caught hold of the arm of one of the Sisters, who was taking communion with her. Then her shoulders rocked and she fell over, pulling the Sister down with her. Two of us dashed forward and dragged poor Colette to her bench. But I was still hoping against hope, and until mass was over I was hoping to hear the Te Deum. As soon as I could, I went back to Colette. The big girls were round her trying to console her, and advising her to give herself to God for ever. She was crying gently, not sobbing. Her head was bent a little forward, and her tears fell on her hands, which were crossed one over the other. I kneeled down in front of her, and when she looked at me, I said: "Perhaps you can get married even though you are a cripple." Colette's story was soon known to everybody. Everybody felt so sad about it that we stopped playing noisy games. Ismérie thought she was telling me a tremendous piece of news when she told me all about it. Sophie told me that we must submit to the will of Our Lady, because she knew what was necessary for Colette's happiness better than we did.

I SHOULD have liked to have known whether Sister Marie-Aimée knew about Colette. I did not see her till the afternoon, when we were out walking. She did not look sad. She looked almost pleased. Never had I seen her look so pretty. Her whole face shone. While we were out I noticed that she walked as though something was lifting her up. I never remembered to have seen her walk like that. Her veil fluttered a little at the shoulders, and her stomacher didn't hide all her neck. She paid no attention to us. She was looking at nothing, but she seemed to be seeing something. Every now and then she smiled as though somebody were talking to her from inside.

In the evening after dinner I found her sitting on the old bench under the big linden tree. M. le Curé was sitting next to her with his back against the tree. They looked serious. I thought they were talking about Colette, and I remained standing some distance from them. Sister Marie-Aimée was saying,

as though she were answering a question, "Yes, when I was fifteen." M. le Curé said, "You had no vocation at fifteen." I didn't hear what Sister Marie-Aimée answered, but M. le Curé went on, "Or, rather, at fifteen you had every possible vocation. A kind word, or a little indifference would be enough to change your whole life." He said nothing for a moment, and then, in a lower tone, added, "Your parents were very much to blame." Sister Marie-Aimée answered, "I regret nothing." They remained for a long time without saying a word. Then Sister Marie-Aimée raised one finger as though she were impressing something on him, and said, "Everywhere, in spite of everything, and always." M. le Curé stretched his hand out a little way, laughed, and repeated, "Everywhere, in spite of everything, and always."

The good night bell sounded all of a sudden, and M. le Curé went off down the avenue of linden trees. For a long time afterwards I used to repeat the words I had heard them say, but I could never fit them in to poor Colette's story.

COLETTE had given up all hopes of a miracle to take her away, and yet she could not make up her mind to remain. When she saw all the girls of her own age go one by one, she began to rebel. She would not go to confession any more, and she would not take holy communion. She used to go to mass because she sang there, and she was fond of music. I often stopped with her and consoled her. She explained to me that marriage meant love.

SISTER MARIE-AIMÉE, who had not been well for some time, became quite ill. Madeleine nursed her devotedly and treated us dreadfully badly. She was particularly unkind to me, and when she saw me tired of sewing she would say, trying to turn her nose up, "If mademoiselle objects to sewing, she had better take a broom and sweep." One Sunday she hit upon the idea of making me clean the stairs during mass. It was January. A damp cold, which came up from the passages, climbed the steps and got under my dress. I swept as hard as I could to keep warm. The sound of the harmonium came from the chapel out to me. From time to time I recognized Madeleine's thin piercing tones, and M. le Curé's jerky notes. I could follow mass by the singing. All of a sudden Colette's voice rose above all the others. It was strong and pure. It broadened, drowned the sound of the harmonium, drowned everything else, and then seemed to fly away over the linden trees, over the house, and over the church spire itself.

It made me tremble, and when the voice came down to earth, trembling a little as it went back into the church and was swept up by the sound of the harmonium again, I began to cry, sobbing as though I were quite a little girl. Then Madeleine's sharp voice pierced through the others once more, and I swept and swept hard as though my broom could scratch out the voice which was so disagreeable to me.

THAT was the day Sister Marie-Aimée called me to her. She had been up in her room for two months. She was getting a little better, but I noticed that her eyes did not shine at all. They made me think of a rainbow which had almost melted away. She made me tell her funny little stories about what had been going on. She tried to smile while she was listening to me, but her lips only smiled on one side of her mouth. She asked me if I had heard her screaming. "Oh, yes," I said, I had heard her during her illness. She had screamed so dreadfully in the middle of the night that the whole dormitory had been kept awake. Madeleine was coming and going. We heard her splashing water about, and when I asked her what was the matter with Sister Marie-Aimée, she said, as she hurried past, "The pains." I remembered at once that Bonne Justine used to have pains too, but she had never screamed like that, and I wondered whether poor Sister Marie-Aimée's legs were swollen to three times their size, like those of Bonne Justine.

Her cries got worse and worse. One of them was so terrible that it seemed to come from her innermost depths. Then we heard her moaning; that was all. A few moments afterwards Madeleine came up and whispered to Marie Renaud. Marie Renaud put on her dress, and I heard her go downstairs. Directly afterwards she came back with M. le Curé. He rushed into Sister Marie-Aimée's room, and Madeleine closed the door behind him. He did not remain very long, but he went away again much more slowly than he had come. He walked with his head sunk down between his shoulders, and his right hand was holding his cloak over his left arm, as though he were carrying something valuable. I thought to myself that he was taking away the holy oils, and I did not dare ask whether Sister Marie-Aimée were dead. I have never forgotten the blow I got from Madeleine's fist when I clung to her dress. She knocked me right over and whispered, as she ran past, "She is better." As soon as Sister Marie-Aimée was well again, Madeleine lost her arrogance, and everything went on as before.

I DISLIKED sewing as much as ever, and my hatred for it began to make Sister Marie-Aimée uneasy. She mentioned it in front of me to M. le Curé's sister. M. le Curé's sister was an old maid with a long face and big faded eyes. We called her Mademoiselle Maximilienne. Sister Marie-Aimée told her how anxious she was about my future. She said that I learned things easily, but that no kind of sewing interested me. She had noticed for some time that I was fond of study, and she had made inquiries to find out whether I had no distant relatives who would look after me, she said. But the only relation I had was an old woman who had adopted my sister, but refused to take me. Mademoiselle Maximilienne offered to take me into her dressmaking business. M. le Curé thought that was a very good idea, and said that he would be pleased to go and teach me a little, twice a week. Sister Marie-Aimée seemed really happy at this. She did not know what to say to thank them. It was agreed that I should go to Mademoiselle Maximilienne as

soon as M. le Curé returned from a journey to Rome which he had to make. Sister Marie Aimée would get my outfit ready for me, and Mademoiselle Maximilienne would go to the Mother Superior and ask her permission, she said. I felt dreadfully uncomfortable at the idea that the Mother Superior was to have anything to do with it. I could not forget the unkind look she always gave me when she passed the old bench and saw me sitting there with Sister Marie-Aimée and M. le Curé. So I waited impatiently to hear what she would say to Mademoiselle Maximilienne. M. le Curé had been away for a week, and Sister Marie-Aimée used to talk to me every day about my new work. She told me how glad she would be to see me on Sundays. She gave me all kinds of good advice, told me to be good and to take care of my health.

THE Mother Superior sent for me one morning. When I went into her room I noticed that she was sitting in a big red armchair. I began to remember some ghost stories which I had heard the girls tell about her, and when I saw her sitting there, all black in the middle of all that red, I compared her in my mind to a huge poppy which had grown in a cellar. She opened and closed her eyelids several times. She had a smile on her face which was like an insult. I felt myself blushing, but I did not turn my eyes away. She gave a little sneering chuckle, and said, "You know why I sent for you?" I answered that I thought it was to talk to me about Mademoiselle Maximilienne. She sneered again, "Oh, yes; Mademoiselle Maximilienne," she said. "Well, my child, you must undeceive yourself. We have made up our minds to place you on a farm in Sologne." She half closed her eyes and snapped out, "You are to be a shepherdess, young woman." Then she added, rapping the words out, "You will look after the sheep." I simply said, "Very well, mother." She pulled herself up

out of the depths of her armchair and asked me, "Do you know what looking after the sheep means?" I answered that I had seen shepherdesses in the fields. She bent her yellow face towards me and went on, "You will have to clean the stables. They smell very unpleasantly, and the shepherdesses are dirty. You will help in the work of the farm, and be taught to milk the cows and look after the pigs." She spoke very loud, as though she were afraid I should not understand her. I answered as I had answered before, "Very well, mother." She pulled herself up by the arms of her chair, fastened her shining eyes on me, and said, "You don't mean to tell me that you are not proud?" I smiled, and said, "No, mother." She seemed very much surprised, but, as I went on smiling, her voice grew softer. "Really, my child?" she said. "I always thought you were proud." She dropped back into her chair again, hid her eyes under their lids, and began talking quickly in a monotonous voice, as she did when she said prayers. She said that I must obey my masters, that I must never forget my religious duties, and that the farmer's wife would come and fetch me the day before the feast of St. John.

I went out of her room with feelings that I cannot express. But I felt horribly afraid of hurting Sister Marie-Aimée's feelings. How could I tell her? I had no time to think. Sister Marie-Aimée was waiting for me in the passage. She took hold of my two shoulders, bent her face towards me, and said, "Well?" She looked anxious. I said, "She wants me to be a shepherdess." She did not understand, and frowned, "A shepherdess," she said. "What do you mean?" I hurried on, "She has found a place for me in a farm, and I am to milk cows and look after the pigs." Sister Marie-Aimée pushed me away so roughly that I bumped against the wall. She ran towards the door. I thought she was going to the Mother Superior's room, but she went out, and came back again, and began walking up and down the passage, taking long steps. Her fists were clenched, and she kept tapping with her foot on the floor. She was breathing hard. Then she leaned up against the wall, let her arms fall as though she were overcome, and, in a voice which seemed to come from a long way off, she said: "She is revenging herself. Yes, she is revenging herself." She came back to me, took my two hands affectionately in hers, and

asked, "Didn't you tell her that you would not go? Didn't you beg her to let you go to Mademoiselle Maximilienne?" I shook my head and repeated in her own words exactly what the Mother Superior had said to me. She listened without interrupting me. Then she told me to say nothing about it to the other girls. She thought that everything would be all right when M. le Curé came back.

NEXT Sunday, as we were getting into line to go to mass, Madeleine ran into the room like a mad thing. She threw her arms in the air, and cried out, "M. le Curé is dead!" and fell right down across the table near her. Everybody stopped talking, and we all ran to Madeleine, who was screaming and crying. We wanted to know all about it. But she rocked herself up and down on the table, and kept on repeating, "He is dead! he is dead!" I could not think at all. I did not know whether I was sorry or not, and all the time mass was going on. Madeleine's voice sounded in my ears like a bell. There was no walk that day. Even the little girls kept quite quiet. I went to look for Sister Marie-Aimée. She had not been at mass, and I knew from Marie Renaud that she was not ill. I found her in the refectory. She was sitting on her little platform. She was leaning her head sideways on the table, and her arms were hanging down beside her chair. I sat myself down some distance away from her. But when I heard her moaning I

began to sob too, hiding my face in my hands. But I did not sob long, and I knew that I was not as sorry as I wanted to be. I tried to cry, but I could not shed a single tear. I was a little bit ashamed of myself because I believed that one ought to cry when somebody died, and I didn't dare uncover my face for fear that Sister Marie-Aimée should think that I was hard hearted. I listened to her crying. Her moaning reminded me of the wind at winter-time in the big fireplace. It went up and down as if she were trying to compose a kind of song. Then her voice stumbled and broke, and ended up in deep trembling notes. A little before dinner-time, Madeleine came into the refectory. She took Sister Marie-Aimée away with her, putting her arm round her, and taking care of her as they walked. In the evening she told us that M. le Curé had died in Rome, and that he would be brought back to be buried with his family.

NEXT day Sister Marie-Aimée looked after us as usual. She didn't cry any more, but she would not let us talk to her. She walked along with her eyes on the ground, and seemed to have forgotten me. I had only one day more, as the Mother Superior had told me I should be fetched next day, for the day after was the feast of St. John. In the evening, at the end of prayers, when Sister Marie-Aimée had said, "Lord, be pitiful to exiles and give your aid to prisoners," she added, in a loud voice, "We will say a prayer for one of your companions who is going out into the world." I understood at once that she was talking of me, and I felt that I was as much to be pitied as the exiles and the prisoners. I could not get to sleep that night. I knew that I was going next day, but I didn't know what Sologne was like. I imagined it to be a country very far off, where there were large plains with flowers on them. I pictured myself the shepherdess of a troop of beautiful white sheep, with two dogs by my side which kept the sheep in order at a

sign from me. I would not have dared to tell Sister Marie-Aimée so, but just then I liked the idea of being a shepherdess much better than the idea of being in a shop. Ismérie, who was snoring loud, next to me, reminded me of my comrades again.

It was such a bright night that I could see all the beds quite distinctly. I looked at one after the other, stopping a little at those of the girls I was fond of. Almost opposite me I saw my friend Sophie, with her magnificent hair. It was scattered about over the pillow, and lighted up the bed quite brightly. A little further down the room were the beds of Chemineau the Proud, and her twin sister, the Fool. Chemineau the Proud had a big smooth white forehead and gentle eyes. She never said it was not true when she was accused of doing anything wrong. She simply shrugged her shoulders and looked round her with contempt. Sister Marie-Aimée used to say that her conscience was as white as her forehead. Chemineau the Fool was half as tall again as her sister. Her hair was coarse, and came down nearly to her eyebrows. Her shoulders were square, and her lips were broad. We used to call her the sister's watch-dog. And down at the other end of the dor-

mitory was Colette. She still believed that I was going to Mademoiselle Maximilienne. She was quite sure that I should get married very young, and she had made me promise to come and fetch her as soon as I was married. I thought about her for a long time. Then I looked at the window and the shadows of the linden trees lengthened about me. It was as though they had come to say good-bye to me, and I smiled at them. On the other side of the lindens I could see the infirmary. It looked as though it were trying to hide itself, and its little windows made me think of weak eyes. I looked at the infirmary for some time, thinking of Sister Agatha. She was so bright and so good that the little girls always laughed when she scolded them. She did the doctoring. When one of us went to her with a hurt finger, she always had something funny to say, and she always knew whether we were greedy or vain, and would promise us a cake or a ribbon accordingly. She used to pretend to look for it, and while we were looking to see where it was, the bad place on the finger would be pricked, washed, and tied up. I remember a chilblain that I had on my foot which would not get well. One morning Sister Agatha said to me solemnly, "Listen,

Marie-Claire. I must put something miraculous on this, and if your foot is not better in three days, we shall have to have it cut off." For three days I was very careful not to walk on that foot so as not to disturb this miraculous something. I thought it must be a piece of the true cross, or perhaps a piece of the veil of the Holy Virgin. On the third day my foot was completely cured, and when I asked Sister Agatha what the miraculous remedy was that she had put on it, she replied with a mischievous laugh, "Little silly, it's the miraculous ointment."

IT was late at night when I went to sleep, and I began to expect the farmer's wife directly morning came. I wanted her to come, and I was afraid of her coming. Sister Marie-Aimée raised her head quickly every time the door opened. Just as we were finishing dinner, the porteress came and asked if I were ready to go. Sister Marie-Aimée said that I should be ready in a moment. She got up and beckoned me to go with her. She helped me to dress, gave me a little bundle of linen, and all of a sudden she said, "They will bring him back to-morrow, and you will not be here." Then she looked into my eyes. "Swear to me," she said, "that you will say a *De Profundis* for him every night." I promised to do so. Then she pulled me to her quite roughly, pressed me to her hard, and ran off to her room. I heard her saying as she went, "My God! this is too much!" I crossed the courtyard by myself, and the farmer's wife, who was waiting for me, took me away.

PART II

I WAS tucked in among a lot of old baskets in a cart covered with a hood, and when the horse stopped of his own accord at the farm it had been dark for a long time.

The farmer came out of the house carrying a lantern which he held high up in the air, and which only lit up the toes of his wooden shoes. He came and helped us to get out of the cart, then he lifted his lantern up to my face, stood back a little and said, "What a funny little servant girl."

His wife took me to a room where there were two beds. She showed me mine, and told me that I should be all alone on the farm with the cowherd next day, because every one was going to the feast of St. John. As soon as I was up next morning, the cowherd took me to the stables to help him give the fodder to the cattle. He showed me the sheep pens, and told me that I was going to look after the lambs instead of old Bibiche. He explained to me that the lambs were taken from their mothers every year, and that a

special shepherdess was needed to look after them. He also told me that the name of the farm was Villevieille, and that nobody was unhappy there because Master* Silvain the farmer, and Pauline, his wife, were kind people.

When he had seen to all the animals the cowherd made me sit down next to him in the chestnut avenue. Sitting there we could see the bend in the lane which went up towards the high-road, and the whole of the farm. The farm buildings formed a square and the huge dunghill in the middle of the yard gave off a warm smell which mixed with the smell of the half-dried hay. The farm was wrapped in silence. I sat and looked all round me. I could see nothing but pine-trees and cornfields. I felt as though I had suddenly been dropped into a forgotten country, where I should always remain, along with the cowherd, and the animals which I could hear moving in their stables. It was very hot. I was numb with a heavy longing to go to sleep, but fear of all the new things which were round me prevented me from letting myself drop off. Flies of all possible colours whizzed round me with a little snoring noise.

* On a French farm the farmer is always called "Master."

The cowherd was making a basket of rushes, and the dogs lay at our feet fast asleep.

Just as the sun was setting, the farmer's cart turned slowly round the bend in the lane. There were five people in it, two men and three women. As they passed us, the farmer's wife smiled down at me, and the others leaned forward to see me. Soon afterwards the farm filled with noise, and as it was too late to make soup for supper we all supped off a piece of bread and a bowl of milk.

NEXT day the farmer's wife gave me a rough cloth cloak, and I went out with old Bibiche to learn how to look after the lambs. Old Bibiche and her dog Castille were so like one another that I always thought they must belong to the same family. They looked about the same age, and their eyes were about the same colour. Whenever the lambs ran off the path Bibiche would say "Bark, Castille, bark." She said it very quickly, almost in one word, and even when Castille did not bark the lambs got back into line again, the old woman's voice was so like that of her dog.

When harvesting began it seemed to me as though I were taking part in something full of mystery. Men went up to the corn and laid it on the ground with regular sweeping strokes, while others picked it up again in sheaves, which they stacked one against the other. The cries of the harvesters seemed to come from above sometimes, and every now and then I looked up quickly, expecting to see golden corn-laden chariots fly past above my head.

We all had our evening meal together. Everybody sat down where they pleased at the long table, and the farmer's wife filled our plates to the brim. The younger ones munched with appetite, while the older ones cut each mouthful as though it were something precious. Everybody ate in silence, and the brown bread looked whiter in their black hands. At the end of the meal the elder ones talked about harvests with the farmer, while the younger ones chatted and laughed with Martine, the shepherdess. She answered everybody's jokes, and laughed heartily at them; but if one of the men stretched out a hand towards her she skipped out of the way, and never let him get hold of her. Nobody paid any attention to me. I sat on a pile of logs a little way distant from the rest of them, and looked at all their faces. Master Silvain had big brown eyes which looked at each one in turn, and rested quietly on them as he looked. He never raised his voice, and leaned his open hands on the table when he spoke. His wife's voice was serious and preoccupied. She always looked as though she were expecting some misfortune to happen and she scarcely smiled at all, even when all the others were roaring with laughter.

Old Bibiche always thought that I was falling asleep. She would come and pull my sleeve, and take me off to bed. Her bed was next to mine. She mumbled her prayers while she was undressing, and always blew the lamp out without waiting to see whether I was ready.

DIRECTLY after the harvest, Bibiche let me go to the fields alone with her dog. Old Castille didn't care for my company. She used to leave me whenever she could and go back to the farm to Bibiche. I had a lot of trouble in keeping my lambs together. They ran every way at once. I compared myself with Sister Marie-Aimée, who always said that her little flock was hard to manage. And yet she used to get us together at one stroke of the bell and she could always make us perfectly quiet by raising her voice a little. But I might raise my voice or crack my whip as much as I liked, the lambs did not understand me, and I was obliged to run about all round the flock as though I were a sheep dog. One evening two lambs were missing. I always stood in the doorway every evening to let them in one by one so that I could count them easily. I went into the pen and tried to count them again. It was not so easy and I had to give it up at last, for every time I counted them again I made their number more than there really were. At last I made up my

mind that I must have counted them wrong the first time, and I did not say anything to anybody.

Next morning when I let them out I counted them once more. There really were two missing. I felt very uneasy. All day long I hunted about the fields for them, and in the evening, when I was quite certain that they were missing, I told the farmer's wife. We searched high and low for those lambs for several days, but we could not find them. The farmer first, and then his wife took me apart, and tried to make me confess that men had come and taken the lambs away. They promised me that I should not be scolded if I would tell the truth. It was no good my saying that I really did not know what had become of them, I could see that they did not believe me.

After this I was frightened when I went into the fields because I knew now that there were men who hid themselves and came and stole the sheep. I was always thinking that I saw someone moving about behind the bushes. I very soon learned to count my lambs by glancing at them, and whether they were all together or scattered about I knew in a minute whether all of them were there.

AUTUMN came and I began to feel unhappy. I missed the kindness of Sister Marie-Aimée. I longed so to see her that I used to shut my eyes and believe that she was coming up the path. When I did this I could really hear her steps and the rustling of her dress on the grass. When I felt her quite close to me I opened my eyes and she disappeared at once. For a long time I had the idea of writing to her, but I did not dare to ask for pen and paper. The farmer's wife did not know how to write, and nobody at the farm ever got any letters. I plucked up courage one day and asked Master Silvain if he would take me to town with him that morning. He didn't answer at once. His big quiet eyes rested on me for a time, and then he said that a shepherdess ought never to leave her flock. He said that he didn't mind taking me to mass in the village now and then, but that I must not expect him to take me to the town. This answer quite stunned me. It was as though I had learned of a great misfortune. And every time I thought of it I

could see Sister Marie-Aimée. She was like some precious thing which the farmer had smashed all to pieces by accident.

On the following Saturday Master Silvain and his wife left in the morning as usual, but instead of remaining in town until evening they came back in the afternoon with a dealer who wanted to buy some of the lambs. I had never thought that one could go to the town and come back again in so short a time. The idea occurred to me that one day I would leave my lambs in the meadow and would run into the town for one kiss from Sister Marie-Aimée. I soon found that that would not be possible, and I decided to go off in the night. I hoped that I should not take much longer than the farmer's horse did, and that by leaving in the middle of the night I could be back in time to take the lambs to pasture in the morning.

That evening I went to bed in my clothes, and when the big clock sounded twelve I slipped out on tip-toe with my shoes in my hand. I leaned against a cart and laced them up, and ran off as fast as I could into the dark. I soon got past the outbuildings of the farm, and then I saw that the night was not very dark. The wind was blowing very hard, and

big black clouds were rolling across the sky under the moon. It was a long way to the high-road, and to get there I had to cross a wooden bridge which was out of repair. The rain of the last few days had swelled the little river and the water splashed up on to the bridge through the rotten planks. I began to get nervous because the water and the wind between them made a noise that I had never heard before. But I refused to be frightened, and ran across the slippery bridge as quickly as I dared.

I got to the high-road sooner than I had expected, and turned to the left as I had seen the farmer turn when he went to market. But a little further along the road divided into two and I didn't know which road to take. I ran a little way up one road and then a little way up another. It was the road to the left that seemed to be the likely one. I took it, and walked fast to make up for lost time.

In the distance I saw a black mass which covered the whole country. It seemed to be coming slowly towards me, and for a moment I wanted to turn back and run. A dog began to bark and that gave me a little confidence, and almost directly afterwards I saw that the black mass in front of me was a wood through

which the road passed. When I got into it the wind seemed to be rougher than ever. It blew in squalls, and the trees struck at one another and rattled their branches and moaned and stooped down to get out of its way. I heard long whistling sounds as the branches cracked and clattered and fell.

Then I heard steps behind me and felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned round quickly, but I saw nobody. Yet I was sure that somebody had touched me with his finger, and the steps went on as though some invisible person were walking round and round me. I began to run so fast that I didn't know whether my feet were touching the ground or not.

The stones sprang out under my shoes and rattled behind me like a little hailstorm. I had only one idea, and that was to run and run until I got out of the forest.

At last I came to a clearing. It was lit up by a pale moon and the tearing wind whirled heaps of leaves up and threw them down again, then rolled them about and about, and turned them over in all directions.

I wanted to stop to get my breath, but the big trees were swinging backwards and forwards with a deafening noise. Their shadows, which looked like great black animals,

threw themselves flat along the road and then slipped away and hid behind the trees. Some of these shadows had shapes which I recognized. But most of them hovered and jumped about in front of me as though they wanted to prevent me from passing. Some of them frightened me so that I took a little run, and jumped over them. I was dreadfully afraid that they would catch at my feet.

The wind went down a little, and rain began to fall in large drops. I had got to the other side of the clearing, and when I came to a little path which disappeared into the wood again, I seemed to see a white wall at the end of it. I went a little way along the path, and saw that it was a house. Without thinking at all I knocked at the door. I wanted to ask the people to shelter me until the wind stopped. I knocked a second time, and heard somebody moving. I thought the door was going to be opened, but a window was opened on the first floor. A man in a night-cap called out, "Who's there?" I answered, "A little girl." He seemed surprised. "A little girl?" he said, and asked me where I came from, where I was going, and what I wanted. I had not expected all these questions, and I said that I was coming from the farm, but told a

lie, and said that I was going to see my mother who was ill. Then I asked him to let me into the house until the rain stopped. He told me to wait, and I heard him talking to somebody else. Then he came back to the window, and asked me if there was anybody with me. He asked me how old I was; and when I said I was thirteen, he said I must be a brave girl to come through the wood alone at night. He remained leaning out of the window a moment, trying to see my face, which was looking up towards him. Then he turned his head to right and left trying to look into the darkness of the wood, and advised me to go on a little further. There was a village at the other side of the wood, he said, and I should find houses there where I could dry my clothes.

I went on into the night. The moon had hidden itself altogether, and a drizzling rain was falling. I had to walk a long time before I got to the village. All the houses were shut up, and I could hardly see them in the dark. A blacksmith was the only person up. When I got to his house I went up the two steps, meaning to rest there. He was busy with a great iron bar, which he was heating in a fire of red coal, and when his arm went up with

the bellows he looked like a giant. Every time the bellows came down the coal flew up and crackled. That made a glimmering light which lit up the walls, on which scythes, saws, and all kinds of knives were hanging. The man's forehead was wrinkled, and he was staring at the fire. I dared not talk to him, and I went away without making any noise.

When it became quite light I saw that I was not very far from the town. I began to recognize the places where Sister Marie-Aimée used to take us when we went for our walks. I was walking very slowly now, and dragged my feet after me because they hurt me. I was so tired that it was all I could do not to sit down on one of the heaps of stone which were on each side of the road.

The sound of a horse and cart rattling along the road as fast as they could go made me turn round, and I remained standing quite still with my heart beating fast. I had recognized the bay mare and the farmer's black beard. He stopped the mare quite close to me, leaned out of the cart, and lifted me up into it by the belt of the dress. He sat me down next to him on the seat, turned the horse round and drove off again at full speed. When we got to the wood Master Silvain made the horse

slow down. He turned to me, looked at me, and said, "It is lucky for you that I caught you up. Otherwise you would have been brought back to the farm between two gendarmes." As I didn't answer, he said again, "Perhaps you don't know that there are gendarmes who bring little girls back, when they run away." I said, "I want to go and see Sister Marie-Aimée." "Are you unhappy with us?" he asked. I said again, "I want to go and see Sister Marie-Aimée." He looked as though he didn't understand, and went on asking me questions, going over the names of everybody on the farm, and asking me if they were kind to me. I made the same answer every time. At last he lost patience with me, sat straight up, and said, "What an obstinate child." I looked up at him and said that I should run away again if he would not take me to Sister Marie-Aimée. I went on looking at him, waiting for an answer, and I could see quite well that he didn't know what to say. He kept still, and thought for several minutes. Then he put his hand on my knee and said, "Listen to me, child, and try and understand what I am going to tell you." And when he had finished speaking I understood that he had promised to keep me

until I was eighteen without ever letting me go to the town. I understood, too, that the Mother Superior could do what she liked with me, and that if I ran away again she would have me locked up, because I ran about the woods during the night. Then the farmer said that he hoped I should forget the convent and that I should grow fond of him, and of his wife, because they wished me to be happy with them. I was very miserable, and it was all I could do not to cry. "Come," said the farmer holding out his hand. "Let us be good friends, shall we?" I put my hand into his, and he held it rather tight. I said I should like to be friends. He cracked his whip, and we soon got through the wood. Rain was still falling in a fine shower like a fog, and the ploughed fields looked drearier than ever. In a field by the road a man came towards us waving his arms. I thought he was threatening me at first, but when he was quite close to us I saw that he was holding something in his left arm, and that his right arm was moving up and down as though he were working a scythe. I was so puzzled that I looked at Master Silvain. As though he were answering a question, he said, "It is Gaboret, sowing." A few minutes after-

wards we got to the farm. The farmer's wife was waiting for us in the doorway. When she saw me she opened her mouth wide as though she had been a long time without breathing, and her serious face looked a little less anxious for a moment. I ran past her, went into the room to fetch my cloak, and went straight out to the pens. The sheep rushed out, tumbling over one another. They ought to have been in the fields a long time before.

ALL day long I thought over what the farmer had said to me. I could not understand why the Mother Superior wanted to prevent me from seeing Sister Marie-Aimée. But I understood that Sister Marie-Aimée could do nothing, and I made my mind up to wait, thinking that a day would come when nobody could prevent me from seeing her again. At bedtime the farmer's wife went up with me to put an extra blanket on my bed, and when she had said "good-night," she told me not to call her "madame" any more. She wanted me to call her Pauline. Then she went away after telling me that both she and her husband looked upon me as a child of the house, and that she would do all she could to make me happy at the farm.

Next day Master Silvain made me sit next to his brother at table. He told me with a laugh that he was not to let me want for anything, because he wanted me to grow. The farmer's brother was called Eugène. He spoke very little, but he always looked at each person who spoke, and his small eyes often

seemed to be laughing at them. He was thirty years old, but he did not look more than twenty. He always had an answer to any question he was asked, and I felt no awkwardness at sitting next to him. He squeezed himself against the wall so as to give me more room at the table, and when the farmer told him to look after me, all he said was, "You need not worry."

Now, after all the fields had been ploughed Martine took her sheep a long way off to some pasture land called the common. The cowherd and I took our flock down the meadows and into the woods where there was fern. I suffered from the cold although I had a big woollen cloak which covered me down to my feet. The cowherd often had to light a fire. He would bake potatoes and chestnuts in the ashes and share them with me. He taught me how to know from which side the wind was coming, so as to make use of the least shelter against the cold. And as we sat over the fire and tried to keep ourselves warm he would sing me a song about "Water and Wine." It was a song which had about twenty verses in it. Water and Wine accused one another of ruining the human race, and at the same time praised themselves tre-

mendously. As far as I could see Water was right, but the cowherd said that Wine was by no means wrong. We used to sit and talk together for hours. He would tell me of his country, which was a long way off from Sologne. He told me that he had always been a cowherd, and that when he was a child a bull had knocked him down and hurt him. He had been ill a long time after that, and the pains in his limbs had made him scream. Then the pains had gone away, but he had become all twisted up as I saw him now. He remembered the names of all the farms where he had been cowherd. Some of the farmers were kind, and some were not, but he had never come across such kind masters as at Villevieille. He said, too, that Master Silvain's cows were not a bit like those of his own country, which were small, and had horns like pointed spindles. The Villevieille cows were big, strong animals with rough crumpled horns. He was very fond of them and used to call each one by name when he talked to them. The one he liked best was a beautiful white cow which Master Silvain had bought in the spring. She was always lifting her head and looking into the distance, and then all of a sudden she would start off at a run.

The cowherd used to call out, "Stop where you are, Blanche! Stop!" She usually obeyed him, but sometimes he had to send the dog after her. Sometimes, too, she used to try and run even when the dog stopped her, and would only come back to the herd when he bit her muzzle. The cowherd used to pity her because, he said, he couldn't say what or whom she was regretting.

IN the month of December the cows remained in the stables. I thought that we should keep the sheep in, too, but the farmer's brother explained to me that Sologne was a very poor country, and that the farmers could not make enough forage to feed the sheep as well. So now I used to go off all by myself with the sheep down the meadows and into the woods. All the birds had gone. Mist spread over the ploughed fields and the woods were full of silence.

There were days when I felt so lonely that I began to believe that the earth had fallen all to pieces round me, and when a crow cawed as it flew past in the grey sky its great hoarse voice seemed to me to be singing of the misfortunes of the world. Even the sheep were quiet. A dealer had taken away all the lambs, and the little ewes did not know how to play alone. They went along pressing up close to each other, and even when they were not cropping what grass there was, their heads were bent. Some of them made me think of little girls I had known. I used to pass them and

stroke them, and make them raise their heads, but their eyes looked down again at once, and the pupils were like glass without a gleam in it.

One day I was surprised by such a thick fog that I could not see my way. All of a sudden I found myself near a big wood which I didn't know. The tops of the trees were lost in the fog, and the ferns looked as though they were all wrapped in wool. White shadows came down from the trees and glided with long transparent trains over the dead leaves. I pushed the sheep towards the meadow which was quite near, but they clustered together and refused to go on. I went in front of them to see what was preventing them from going any further, and I recognized the little river which flowed at the bottom of the hill.

I could scarcely see the water. It seemed to be sleeping under a thick white woollen blanket. I stood looking at it for one long minute, then I got my sheep together and took them back along the road. While I was trying to find out where the farm was, the sheep ran round the wood and got into a lane with a hedge on each side of it. The fog was getting thicker than ever, and I thought I was walking between two high walls. I followed the sheep

without knowing where they were taking me. Suddenly they left the lane and turned to the right; but I stopped them. I saw a church just in front of us. The doors were wide open, and on either side I could see two red lamps which lit up a grey vaulted roof. There were two straight lines of huge pillars, and at the other end one could just see the windows with their small panes on which a light was shining. It was all I could do to keep the sheep from going into the church, and as I was pushing them away I noticed that they were covered with little white beads. They shook themselves every moment and the beads made a tinkling sound. I got very anxious, for I knew that Master Silvain must be waiting for us, and wondering where we were. I felt sure that if I were to go back the way I had come I must soon find the farm, so making as little noise as I could I pushed the sheep back into the lane, which led to the church. As I was going into the lane a man's voice sounded right over my head. The voice said, "Let the poor brutes go home." As he spoke the man turned the sheep back towards the church again, and I recognized Eugène, the farmer's brother. He passed his hand over the back of one of the sheep and said, "How

pretty they are with their little frost balls. But it is not good for them."

I was not at all surprised at meeting him there. I showed him the church and asked him what it was. "It was for you," he said. "I was afraid that you would not find the avenue of chestnut trees, and I hung up a lantern on each side." I felt all confused. It was only a few moments afterwards that I understood that the great pillars, blackened and worn by centuries, were simply the trunks of the chestnut trees, and then I recognized the small-paned windows of the farm-house kitchen, which the fire lit up from inside. Eugène counted the sheep himself. He helped me to make them a warm litter of straw, and as we left the pen together he asked me if I really didn't know what had become of the two lambs that had been lost. I felt dreadfully ashamed at the thought that he could believe that I had told a lie, and I could not help crying, and told him that they had disappeared without my having seen how or where they went. Then he told me that he had found them drowned in a water-hole. I thought he was going to scold me for not having watched them better, but he said gently, "Go and get warm; you have got all the rime

of Sologne in your hair." I made up my mind that I would go and see the water-hole instead. But during the night snow fell so quickly that we couldn't go out to the fields next day.

I helped old Bibiche to mend the household linen; Martine sat down to her spinning wheel, and I sang to them while we sewed and Martine span.

WHILE we sat at work that evening the dogs never stopped barking furiously. Martine seemd anxious. She listened to the dogs, and then turning to the farmer she said, "I am afraid this weather will bring the wolves down." The farmer got up to go out and talk to the dogs, and took his lantern to make a round of the outhouses. During the week that the snow lasted hundreds of crows came to the farm. They were so hungry that nothing frightened them. They went into the cowhouse and the pens and into the granary, and they made very free with the corn ricks. The farmer killed a lot of them. We cooked some of them with bacon and cabbage. Everybody thought them very good, but the dogs wouldn't eat them.

THE first day we let the sheep and cows out, the pine trees were still heavy with snow. The hill was all white too. It seemed to have come closer to the farm. All this white dazzled me. I could not find things in their places, and every moment I was afraid that I should not see the blue smoke curling up over the farm roofs any longer. The sheep could not find anything to eat, and ran about searching. I did not let them scatter too much. They looked like moving snow, and I was obliged to watch them closely so as not to lose sight of them. I managed to get them together in a meadow which skirted a big wood. The whole forest was busy getting rid of the snow which weighed it down. The big branches threw the snow off at one shake, while the others which were not so strong, stooped and bent themselves to make it slip down. I had never been into this forest. I only knew that it was a very big one, and that Martine sometimes took her sheep there. The pine trees were very tall, and the ferns grew very high.

I had been watching a big clump of ferns for a long time. I thought I had seen it move, and I heard a sound come out of it as though a bit of stick had broken under a footstep. I felt frightened. I thought there was somebody there. Then I heard the same sound again much nearer, but without seeing anything move. I tried to reassure myself by saying to myself that it was a hare, or some other little animal which was looking for food; but in spite of all I could try to think, I felt there was somebody there. I felt so nervous that I made up my mind to go nearer the farm. I had taken two steps towards my sheep when they huddled together and moved away from the wood. I was looking about to see what had frightened them, when quite close to me, in the very middle of the flock, I saw a yellow dog carrying off one of the sheep in his mouth. My first idea was that Castille had gone mad; but at the same moment Castille tumbled up against my dress and howled plaintively. Then I guessed that it was a wolf. It was carrying off a sheep which it held by the middle of its body. It climbed up a hillock without any difficulty, and as it jumped the broad ditch which separated the field from the forest its hind-legs made me think of wings. At

that moment I should not have thought it at all extraordinary if it had flown away over the trees. I stood there for a few moments, without knowing whether I was frightened. Then I felt that I could not take my eyes away from the ditch. My eyelids had become so stiff that I thought I should never be able to close them again. I wanted to call out, so that they should hear me at the farm, but I could not get my voice out of my throat. I wanted to run, but my legs were trembling so that I was obliged to sit down on the wet grass. Castille went on howling as though she were in pain, and the sheep remained huddled together.

When I got them back to the farm at last, I ran to look for Master Silvain. As soon as he saw me he guessed what had happened. He called his brother and took down their two guns, and I tried to show him which way the wolf had gone. They both came back at nightfall without having found him. We talked of nothing else all the evening. Eugène wanted to know what the wolf looked like; and old Bibiche got angry when I said that he had a long yellow coat like Castille, but that he was much handsomer than she was.

A FEW days afterwards it was Martine's turn. She had just taken her sheep out, and she had hardly reached the end of the avenue of chestnut trees when we heard her shouting. Everybody rushed out of the house. I got to Martine first. She was stooping down and pulling as hard as she could at a sheep which a wolf had just killed, and was trying to carry off. The wolf had the sheep by the throat, and was pulling as hard as Martine was. Martine's dogs bit the wolf's legs, but he didn't seem to feel it, and when Master Silvain fired full at him he rolled over with a piece of the sheep's throat between his teeth. Martine's eyes were staring and her mouth had become quite white. Her cap had slipped off her head, and the parting which divided her hair into two made me think of a broad path on which one could walk without any danger. The usual strong expression of her face had changed into a sad little grimace, and her hands kept opening and closing, the two of them keeping time. She had been leaning against the chestnut tree, and she went up

to Eugène, who was looking at the wolf. She stood by him for a moment looking at the dead wolf too, and said aloud: "Poor brute! How hungry he must have been!" The farmer put the wolf and the sheep on the same wheelbarrow, and wheeled them back to the farm. The dogs followed, sniffing at the barrow, and looking frightened.

For several days the farmer and his brother went out shooting in the neighbourhood. Whenever Eugène came anywhere near me he would stop and say a kind word. He told me that the noise they made with their guns drove the wolves away, and that one very rarely saw any in that part of the country. But although he said that there was little or no danger I didn't care to go back to the big forest. I preferred to go up on to the hill which was covered only with brooms and ferns.

AT the beginning of the spring the farmer's wife taught me how to milk the cows and look after the pigs. She said she wanted to make a good farmer of me. I could not help thinking of the Mother Superior and the disdainful tone in which she had said to me, "You will milk the cows and look after the pigs." When she said that she said it as though she were giving me a punishment, and here I was delighted at having them to look after. I used to lean my forehead against a cow's flank to get a better purchase, and I very soon filled my pail. At the top of the milk a foam used to form which caught all kinds of changing colours, and when the sun passed over it it become so marvellously beautiful that I was never tired of looking at it.

Looking after the pigs never disgusted me. Their food was boiled potatoes and curdled milk. I used to dip my hands into the bucket to mix it all up, and I loved making them wait for their food a few minutes. Their eager cries and the way they wiggled their snouts about always amused me.

WHEN May came Master Silvain added a she-goat to my flock. He had bought it to help Pauline to feed the little baby she had got after they had been married ten years. This goat was more difficult to take care of than all the rest of the flock. It was always her fault when my flock got into the standing oats, which were pretty high. The farmer saw what had happened and scolded me. He said that I must have been asleep in a corner while my sheep were trampling his oats down. Every day I had to pass near a wood of young pine trees. The goat used to get there in three jumps, and it was while I was looking for her that my lambs got into the oats.

The first time I waited ever so long for her to come back by herself. I made my voice as soft as I could and called to her. At last I made up my mind to go and fetch her, but the young pines were so close together that I didn't know how to get after her. On the other hand, I could not go away without knowing what had happened to the goat. I

thought I remembered the place where she had disappeared, and I went in there, putting my hands in front of my face to keep the thorns off. I saw her almost at once through my fingers. She was quite near me. I stretched my hands out to get hold of one of her horns, but she backed through the branches, which flew back and struck me in the face. At last, however, I got hold of her and brought her back to the flock. She began again next day, and every day she did the same thing. I got my sheep as far away as I could from the oats, and rushed after her. She was a white goat, and when she had first come I thought she was like Madeleine. She had the same kind of eyes, set far away from each other. When I forced her to come out of the pine trees, she looked at me for a long time without moving her eyes, and I thought that Madeleine must have been turned into a goat. Sometimes I told her not to do it again, and I was quite sure that she understood me when I told her how unkind she was. As I was struggling out of the pine wood my hair fell all about me, and I shook my head to throw it forward. The goat sprang to one side bleating with fear. She lowered her horns and came at me, but I lowered my head

and shook my hair at her. My hair was long and dragged along the ground. She rushed off, leaping this way and that. Every time she went into the pine wood I took my revenge on her by frightening her with my hair. Master Silvain surprised us one morning when I was butting at her. He laughed and laughed till I didn't know which way to look. I tried to throw my hair back quickly. The she-goat came close up to me. She looked at me, stretching her neck and wriggling her back about in the funniest way. The farmer could not stop laughing. He bent almost double, holding his sides and simply roared with laughter. All I could see of him were his eyebrows, his beard, and his big hat. His shouts of laughter made me want to cry. When he had stopped laughing he asked me all about it. I told him how wicked the goat had been, and he shook his finger at her and laughed again. Martine took her out next day; but the day after she said that she would rather leave the farm than take out that she-goat again. It was possessed of the devil, she said.

Old Bibiche used to say that goats ought to be beaten, but I remembered the only time I had beaten her. Her ribs had made such a

strange hollow sound that I never dared touch her again. She was left free to run about the farm, and one day she disappeared. We never found out what had become of her.

The feast of St. John was drawing near, and to celebrate the anniversary of my arrival on the farm Eugène said that I must be taken to the village. In honour of this feast day the farmer's wife gave me a yellow dress which she used to wear when she was a girl. The village was called Sainte Montagne. It only had one street, at the end of which was a church. Martine took me into mass, which had already begun. She pushed me on to a bench and she sat down on the one in front of me. There were two women behind me who never stopped talking about yesterday's market, and the men near the door talked out loud without seeming to mind. They only stopped talking when the priest mounted the pulpit. I thought he was going to preach, but he only gave out notices of the weddings. Every time he mentioned a name the women leaned to right and left and smiled. I never even thought of praying. I looked at Martine, who was on her knees. Her dark curls had got out from under her embroidered cap. Her shoulders were broad, and her white

bodice was fastened at the waist with a black ribbon. The whole of her made one think of something fresh and new, and yet the Mother Superior had told me that shepherdesses were dirty. I thought of Martine and how smart she always looked in her short striped petticoat, her stockings, which were always tightly drawn, and her wooden shoes covered with leather, which she blacked like boots. She was always very careful of her flock, and the farmer's wife used to say that she knew every one of her sheep. When we came out of mass she left me and ran up to an old woman, whom she kissed tenderly. Then I lost sight of her and remained all by myself, not knowing where to go. A little way off I saw the inn of the "White Horse." There was a noise of voices there and I could hear dishes and plates rattling. People went in in crowds, and presently there was nobody left outside. I was going back into the church to wait for Martine to come and fetch me when I saw Eugène. He took me by the hand, and said, laughing as he spoke, "If your dress had not been as yellow as it is I should certainly have forgotten you." He looked at me as though he were making fun of me and as though he were amused at something. He took me to

the schoolmaster and asked him to give me luncheon, and to take me for a walk with the children. The schoolmaster was dressed like the gentlemen of the town. Eugène wore a blue blouse, and I was very much surprised to see them so friendly together. While we were waiting for lunch the schoolmaster lent me a book of fairy tales, and when the time came for the walk I would much rather have been left alone to finish the book.

On the village green the boys and girls were dancing in the sunshine and the dust. I thought that they danced too roughly, and that they were too noisy.

I felt very sad, and when the cart drove us back to the farm at nightfall I felt really glad to be back in the silence and the sweet smell of the meadows again.

A FEW days after that, on our way home from the forest, a sheep which had been grazing near the hedge, jumped right up into the air. I went to see what was the matter, and saw that his nose was bleeding. I thought that he must have pricked himself with a big thorn, and after having washed him I didn't think anything more about it. Next day I was terrified to see that his head had swollen up till it was almost as big as his body. It frightened me so much that I screamed. Martine came running up, and she began screaming too, and everybody came. I explained what had happened the day before, and the farmer said that the sheep must have been bitten by a viper. He would have to be cared for, and must be left in the stable until the swelling had gone down. I asked nothing better than to look after the poor brute, but when I was alone with it I felt frightened to death. That enormous head, which wobbled on the little body, made me half crazy with terror. The great big eyes, the enormous mouth and the ears, which stood

straight up, made a monster almost impossible to imagine. The poor beast always remained in the middle of the stable, as though he were afraid of bumping himself against the wall. I tried to go to him, telling myself that it was only a sheep after all, but I could not. But directly he turned towards me I felt dreadfully sorry for him. Sometimes I used to think that this dreadful face which wobbled from right to left was reproaching me. Then something seemed to wobble inside my head, and I felt as though I were going mad. I quite understood that I was perfectly capable of letting him die of hunger. I told the cowherd about it, and he said that he would look after the sheep as long as the inflammation lasted. He laughed at me a little, and said he could not understand how I could be afraid of a sick sheep.

I was able to do him a good turn afterwards, and I was very glad. When he let the bull out one morning, he had slipped and fallen in front of him. The bull had sniffed and smelt at him. He was a young bull, which had been brought up on the farm, and was a little bit wild. The cowherd was afraid of him, and felt quite certain that he would remember that he had seen him on the ground in front of him. I should have liked to make him under-

stand that there was nothing to be afraid of, but I didn't know what to say to prevent his being frightened. I was quite surprised at noticing all of a sudden how old he was. His hat had dropped on to the ground, and I noticed for the first time that his hair was quite grey. I thought about him all day long, and next day, while the cows were going out one by one, I went into the stable. The cowherd was looking at the bull, who was pulling at the chain. I went up to him, patted him, and let him loose. The cowherd stood on one side, and the bull rushed out as if he were mad. The herd looked at him in surprise, and limped after him. I was not nearly so frightened of the bull as I had been of the sheep with the swollen face, and I used to go into the stable every day, slipping in quietly so as not to be seen. But Eugène had seen me. He took me aside one morning, and looking right into my eyes with his little eyes, he said, "Why did you let the bull loose?" I was afraid the cowherd would be scolded if I told the truth, and tried to find something to say to him. I began to say that I didn't let him loose. Then Eugène gave a little chuckle, and said, "You don't mean to tell me that you tell lies, do you?" I told him everything, and they sold the bull next Saturday.

I HAD often noticed how kind Eugène was to everybody. Whenever the farmer had any difficulties with his men he always used to call his brother, who would settle everything with a few words. Eugène did the same work on the farm as Master Silvain did, but he always refused to go to market. He said that he would not know how to sell even a cheese. He walked slowly, rocking himself a little as he walked, as though he were trying to keep time with his oxen. He went to Sainte Montagne nearly every Sunday. When the weather was bad he would remain in the living-room at the farm-house and read. I used to hope that he would leave his book behind him one day; but he never forgot it, and always took it to his room with him. One of my great troubles was that I could not find anything to read in the farm, and I used to pick up any bits of printed paper that I saw lying about. The farmer's wife had noticed this, and said that I should become a miser some day. One Sunday, when I had screwed up my courage and asked Eugène for a book,

he gave me a book of songs. All through the summer I took it with me to the fields. I made up tunes for the songs which I liked best. Then I got tired of them, and when I was helping Pauline to clean up the farm for All Saints Day, I found several almanacks. Pauline told me to take them up to the garret, but I pretended to forget, and carried them off to read in secret, one after the other. They were full of amusing stories, and the winter went by without my ever noticing the cold.

When I took them up to the garret at last, I hunted about up there to see if I could not find any others. The only thing I found was a little book without any cover. The corners of the leaves were rolled up as if it had been carried about in somebody's pocket for a long time. The two first pages were missing, and the third page was so dirty that I could not read the print. I took it under the skylight, to see a little better, and I saw that it was called "The Adventures of Telemachus." I opened it here and there, and the few words that I read interested me so much that I put it in my pocket at once.

While I was on my way down from the garret, it suddenly occurred to me that Eugène might have put the book there, and that he

might come and look for it at any time. So I put it back on the black rafter where I had found it. Every time I could manage to go to the garret I looked to see whether it was still in its place, and I read it as much and as often as ever I could.

JUST about that time I had another sick sheep. Its flanks were hollow, as though it had not eaten for a long while. I went and asked the farmer's wife what I ought to do with it. She was plucking a chicken, and asked me whether the sheep was "drawn." I didn't answer at once. I didn't quite know what she meant. Then I thought that probably whenever a sheep was ill it was "drawn," and I said "Yes." And so as to make it quite clear, I added, "It is quite flat." Pauline began to laugh at me. She called Eugène, and said, "Eugène! One of Marie-Claire's sheep is drawn and flat too." That made Eugène laugh. He said I was only a second-hand shepherdess, and explained to me that sheep were "drawn" when their stomachs were swollen.

Two days afterwards Pauline told me that she and Master Silvain saw that they would never make a good shepherdess of me, and that they were going to give me work to do in the house. Old Bibiche was not good for much, and Pauline could not do everything herself,

because of her baby. When they told me this, my first thought was that I should be able to go up to the garret more often, and I kissed Pauline and thanked her.

SO I became a farm servant. I had to kill the chickens and the rabbits. I hated doing it, and Pauline could never understand why. She said I was like Eugène, who ran away when a pig was being killed. However, I wanted to try and kill a chicken so as to show that I did my best. I took it into the granary. It struggled in my hands, and the straw all round me got red. Then it got quite still, and I put it down for Bibiche to come and pluck it. But when she came she cackled with laughter because the chicken had got on to its feet again, and was in the middle of a basket of corn. It was eating greedily, as though it wanted to get well as quickly as possible after the way in which I had hurt it. Bibiche got hold of it, and when she had passed the blade of her knife across its neck the straw was much redder than it had been before.

Instead of going to sleep in the middle of the day, I used to go up to the garret to read. I opened the book anywhere, and every time I read it over again I found something new in it. I loved this book of mine. For me it

was like a young prisoner whom I went to visit secretly. I used to imagine that it was dressed like a page, and that it waited for me on the black rafter. One evening I went on a lovely journey with it. I had closed the book, and was leaning on my elbows and looking out of the skylight in the garret. It was almost evening, and the pine trees looked less green. The sun was pushing its way into the white clouds which hollowed themselves and then swelled out again like down and feathers do when you push something into a sackful of them.

Without quite knowing how, I found myself, all of a sudden, flying over a wood with Telemachus. He held me by the hand, and our heads touched the blue of the sky. Telemachus said nothing, but I knew that we were going up into the sun. Old Bibiche called to me from below. I recognized her voice, although it was so far off. She must be very angry, I thought, to be calling so loud. I didn't care. I saw nothing but the bright flakes of white down which surrounded the sun and which were opening slowly to let us pass in. A tap on my arm brought me back with a rush into the garret. Old Bibiche was pulling me away from the skylight, and say-

ing, "Why do you make me shout like that? I have called you at least twenty times to come and get your supper!" A little while later I missed the book from the rafter. But it had become a friend which I carried about in my heart, and I have always remembered it.

TWO days before Christmas, Master Silvain got ready to kill a pig. He sharpened two big knives, and after having made a litter of fresh straw in the middle of the yard, he sent for the pig, which made such a noise that I was sure he knew what was going to happen. Master Silvain roped up his four feet, and while he fastened them to pegs which he had hammered into the ground, he said to his wife, "Hide the knives, Pauline. Don't let him see them!" Pauline gave me a sort of deep dish, which I was to hold carefully, so as not to lose a single drop of the blood which I was to catch in it. The farmer went to the pig, which had fallen on its side. He went down on one knee in front of him, and, after having felt his neck, he reached his hand out behind his back to his wife; she gave him the bigger of the two knives. He put the point on the place he had marked with his finger, and pressed it slowly in. The pig's cries were just like the cries of a baby. A drop of blood came from the wound and rolled slowly down in a long red line. Then two spurts ran up

the knife and fell on the farmer's hand. When the blade was right in up to the handle, Master Silvain put his weight on it for a moment and drew it out again as slowly as he had put it in. When I saw the blade come out again all striped with red, I felt my mouth grow cold and dry. My fingers went limp, and the dish toppled over to one side. Master Silvain saw it. He gave me one look and said to his wife, "Take the dish away from her." I could not say a word, but I shook my head to say "No." The farmer's look had taken my nervousness away, and I held the dish quite steadily under the spurt of blood which came out from the pig's wound. When the pig was quite still, Eugène came up. He looked amazed at seeing me carefully catching the last red drops which were rolling down one by one like tears. "Do you mean to say you caught the blood?" he asked. "Yes," said the farmer; "that shows that she is not a chicken heart, like you." "It is quite true," said Eugène to me, "I hate seeing animals killed." "Nonsense," said Master Silvain. "Animals are made to feed us just as wood is made to warm us." Eugène turned away a little, as though he were ashamed of his weakness. His shoulders were thin, and his neck

was as round as Martine's. Master Silvain used to say that he was the living portrait of their mother.

I had never seen Eugène angry. He hummed songs all day long. In the evening he used to come back from the fields sitting sideways on one of the oxen, and he nearly always sang the same song. It was the story of a soldier, who went back to the war after he had learned that his sweetheart had married another man. He used to dwell on the refrain, which finished like this—

> And when a bullet comes and takes
> Away my precious life,
> You'll know I died because you were
> Another fellow's wife.*

Pauline always used to treat Eugène with much respect. She could never understand my freedom with him. The first evening that she saw me sitting next to him on the bench outside the door she made signs to me to come in. But Eugène called me back, saying, "Come and listen to the wood owl." We often used to be sitting on the bench, still,

> * Quand par un tour de maladresse
> Un boulet m'emportera
> Allons adieu chere maitresse
> Je m'en vais dans les combats.

when everybody had gone to bed. The wood owl came quite near to an old elm tree which was by the door, and we used to think that it was saying "good night" to us. Then it would fly away, its great wings passing over us in silence. Sometimes a voice would sing on the hillside. I used to tremble when I heard it. The full voice coming out of the night reminded me of Colette. Eugène would get up to go in when the voice stopped singing, but I always used to stop, hoping to hear it again. Then he would say, "Come along in; it is all over."

AND now that the winter was with us again, and we could no longer sit on the bench by the door, there seemed to be a sort of secret understanding between us. Whenever he was making fun of anybody, his queer little eyes used to look for mine, and whenever he gave an opinion he used to turn to me as though he expected me to approve or disapprove. It seemed to me that I had always known him, and deep down in my thoughts I used to call him my big brother. He was always asking Pauline if she was pleased with me. Pauline said that there was no need to tell him the same thing twice. The only thing she reproached me with was that I had no system in my work. She used to say that I was just as likely to begin at the end of it as at the beginning. I had not forgotten Sister Marie-Aimée, but I was no longer as sick with longing for her as I used to be. And I was happy on the farm.

IN the month of June the men came, as they came every year, to shear the sheep. They brought bad news with them. All over the country the sheep were falling ill as soon as they had been shorn, and numbers of them were dying. Master Silvain took his precautions, but in spite of all he could do, a hundred of the sheep fell sick. A doctor said that by bathing them in the river a good many of them might be saved. So the farmer got into the water up to his middle, and dipped the sheep in one by one. He was red hot, and the perspiration rolled down his forehead and fell in great drops into the river. That evening when he went to bed he was feverish, and the third day he died of inflammation of the lungs. Pauline could not believe in her misfortune, and Eugène wandered about the stables and the outhouses with frightened eyes.

SOON after the farmer's death, the landlord of the farm came to see us. He was a little dry stick of a man, who never kept still for a minute, and if he did stand still he always seemed to be dancing on one foot. His face was clean-shaven, and his name was M. Tirande. He came into the living-room where I was sitting with Pauline. He walked round the room with his shoulders hunched up. Then he said, pointing to the baby, "Take him away. I want to talk with the good wife." I went out into the yard, and managed to pass the window as often as I could. Pauline had not moved from her chair. Her hands lay on her knees, and she was bending her head forward as though she were trying to understand something very difficult. M. Tirande was talking without looking at her. He kept walking from the fireplace to the door and back again, and the noise of his heels on the tiled floor got mixed up with his broken little voice. He came out again as fast as he had come in, and I went and asked Pauline what he had said. She took the baby in her arms

and, crying as she told me, she said that M. Tirande was going to take the farm away from her and give it to his son, who had just got married.

At the end of the week M. Tirande came back with his son and his daughter-in-law. They visited the outhouses first, and when they came into the house, M. Tirande stopped in front of me a minute, and told me that his daughter-in-law had made up her mind to take me into her service. Pauline heard him say so, and made a step towards me. But just then Eugène came in with a lot of papers in is hand, and everybody sat down round the table. While they were all reading the papers and signing, I looked at M. Tirande's daughter-in-law. She was a big, dark woman with large eyes and a bored look. She left the farm with her husband without having glanced at me once. When their cart had disappeared down the avenue of chestnut trees, Pauline told Eugène what M. Tirande had said to me. Eugène, who was leaving the room, turned to me suddenly. He looked very angry, and his voice was quite changed. He said that these people were disposing of me as though I were a bit of furniture which belonged to them. While Pauline was pitying

me, Eugène told me that it was M. Tirande who had told Master Silvain to take me on the farm. He reminded Pauline how sorry the farmer had been because I was such a weakling, and he told me that he was very sorry not to be able to take me with them to their new farm. We were all three standing in the living-room. I could feel Pauline's sad eyes on my head, and Eugène's voice made me think of a hymn. Pauline was to leave the farm at the end of the summer.

I worked hard every day to put the linen in order. I didn't want Pauline to take away a single piece of torn linen with her. I worked hard with my darning-needle, as Bonne Justine had taught me, and I folded every piece as well as I could.

In the evening I found Eugène sitting on the bench by the door. The moon was shining on the roofs of the sheep-pens, and there was a white cloud over the dung-heap which looked like a tulle veil. There was no sound whatever from the cowhouse. All that we heard was the squeaking of the cradle which Pauline was rocking to put her child to sleep.

As soon as the corn had been got in, Eugène began getting ready to go. The cowherd took away the cattle, old Bibiche went off in

the cart with all the birds of the poultry-yard. In a few days nothing was left at the farm but the two white oxen, which Eugène would trust to nobody but himself. He fastened them to the cart which was to take Pauline and her child. The little fellow was fast asleep in a basket full of straw, and Eugène put him into the cart without waking him up. Pauline covered him with her shawl, made the sign of the cross towards the house, took up the reins, and the cart went slowly off under the chestnut trees.

I wanted to go with them as far as the high-road, and I followed the cart, walking behind the oxen, between Eugène and Martine. None of us spoke. Every now and then Eugène gave the oxen a friendly pat. We were quite a long way on the road when Pauline saw that the sun was setting. She stopped the horse, and, when I had climbed on to the step to kiss her good-bye, she said sadly, "God be with you, my girl. Behave well." Then her voice filled with tears, and she added, "If my poor husband were living he would never have given you up." Martine kissed me, and smiled. "We may see one another again," she said. Eugène took his hat off. He held my hand in his for a long time, and said

slowly, "Good-bye, dear little friend. I shall always remember you."

I walked a little way back, and turned round to see them again, and, although it was getting dark, I saw that Eugène and Martine were walking hand in hand.

PART III

THE new farmers came next day. The farm hands and the serving women had come early in the morning, and when the masters arrived in the evening I knew that they were called Monsieur and Madame Alphonse. M. Tirande remained at Villevieille for two days, and went off after reminding me that I was in his daughter-in-law's service now, and that I should have to do no more outside work on the farm.

THE very first week she was there Madame Alphonse had had Eugène's room turned into a linen-room, and she had set me to work at a big table on which were a number of pieces of linen which I was to make into sheets and other things. She came and sat down next to me, and worked at making lace. She would remain for whole days at a time without saying a word. Sometimes she talked to me about the linen presses which her mother had, full of all kinds of linen.

Her voice had no ring to it, and she scarcely moved her lips when she spoke. M. Tirande seemed very fond of his daughter-in-law. Every time he came he always asked her what she would like him to give her. She cared for nothing but linen, and he went off saying that he would get her some more.

M. Alphonse never appeared at all except at meal times. I should have found it very difficult to say what he did with his time. His face reminded me of the Mother Superior's face somehow. Like her, he had

a yellow skin and his eyes glittered. He looked as though he carried a brazier inside him which might burn him up at any minute. He was very pious, and every Sunday he and Madame Alphonse went to mass in the village where M. Tirande lived. At first they wanted to take me in their cart, but I refused. I preferred going to Sainte Montagne, where I always hoped to meet Pauline or Eugène. Sometimes one of the farm hands came with me, but more often I would go alone by a little cross-road, which made the way much shorter. It was a steep and stony bit of road which ran uphill through the broom. On the very top of it I always used to stop in front of Jean le Rouge's house. This house was low-roofed and spreading. The walls were as black as the thatch which covered it, and it was quite easy to pass by the house without seeing it at all, for the broom grew so high all round it. I used to go in for a chat with Jean le Rouge, whom I had known ever since I had been at Villevieille farm. He had always worked for Master Silvain, who thought very highly of him. Eugène used to say of him that one could set him to anything, and that whatever he did he did well.

NOW M. Alphonse refused to employ him any more. He spoke of sending him away from the house on the hill. Jean le Rouge was so upset by the idea that he could talk of nothing else.

Directly after mass I used to go home by the same road. Jean's children would crowd round me to get the consecrated wafer, which I brought out of church for them. There were six of them, and the eldest was not yet twelve years old. There was hardly one mouthful of my consecrated wafer, so I used to give it to Jean's wife to divide up and give to the children in equal shares. While she was doing this, Jean le Rouge would set a stool for me in front of the fire and would seat himself on a log of wood, which he would roll to the fireplace with his foot. His wife put some twigs on the fire with a pair of heavy pincers, and as we sat and talked we watched the big yellow potatoes cooking in the pot which hung from a hook in the fireplace.

On the very first Sunday Jean le Rouge had told me, "I too was a foundling." Little by

little he had told me that when he was twelve he had been put to work with a woodcutter who used to live in the house on the hill. He had very soon learned how to climb up the trees to fasten a rope to the top branches so as to pull them over. When the day's work was done and he had his faggot of wood on his back, he would go on ahead so as to get to the house first. And there he used to find the woodcutter's little daughter cooking the soup for supper. She was of the same age as he was, and they had become the best of friends at once.

Then, one Christmas Eve, came the misfortune. The old woodcutter, who thought that the children were fast asleep, went off to midnight mass. But directly he had gone they got up. They wanted to prepare midnight supper for the old man's return, and they danced with glee at the surprise they were getting ready for him. While the little girl was cooking the chestnuts and putting the pot of honey and the jug of cider on the table, Jean le Rouge heaped great logs on to the fire. Time went on, the chestnuts were cooked, and the woodcutter had not yet come home. It seemed a long time. The children sat down on the floor in front of the fire

to keep themselves warm, leaned up against one another, and fell asleep. Jean woke up at the little girl's screams. He could not understand at first why she was throwing her arms about and shrieking at the fire. He jumped to his feet to run away from her, and then he saw that she was ablaze. She had opened the door to the garden, and as she ran out she lit the trees up. Then Jean had caught hold of her and thrown her into the little well. The water had put the flames out, but when Jean tried to pull her out of the well he found her so heavy that he thought she must be dead. She made no movement, and it took him a long time to get her out. At last, when he did get her out, he had to drag her along like a bundle of sticks back to the house.

The logs had become great red embers. Only the biggest one, which was wet, went on smoking and crackling. The little girl's face was all bloated, and was black with violet veins in it. Her body, which was half naked, was covered with big red burns.

She was ill for many months, and when at last they thought she was cured, they found out that she had become dumb. She could hear perfectly well, she could even laugh like

everybody else, but it was quite impossible for her to speak a single word.

While Jean le Rouge was telling me these things his wife used to look at him and move her eyes as if she were reading a book. Her face still bore deep burn marks, but one soon got accustomed to it, and remembered nothing of her face but the mouth with its white teeth, and her eyes, which were never still. She used to call her children with a long, low cry, and they came running up, and always understood all the signs she made to them. I was so sorry that they had to leave the house on the hill. They were the last friends I had left, and I thought of telling Madame Alphonse about them, hoping that she might get her husband to keep them on. I found an opportunity one day, when M. Tirande and his son had come into the linen-room talking about the changes they were going to make at the farm. M. Alphonse said he didn't want any cattle. He spoke of buying machinery, cutting down the pine trees and clearing the hillside. The stables would do for sheds for the machines, and he would use the house on the hill to store fodder in. I don't know whether Madame Alphonse was listening. She went on making lace, and seemed to be

giving her full attention to it. As soon as the two men had gone I plucked up courage to talk of Jean le Rouge. I told her how useful he had been to Master Silvain. I told her how sorry he was to leave the house in which he had lived for so long, and when I stopped, trembling for the answer which was coming, Madame Alphonse took her needles out of the thread. "I believe I have made a mistake," she said. She counted up to nineteen, and said again, "What a nuisance it is. I shall have to undo a whole row." When I told Jean le Rouge about this, he was angry, and shook his fist at Villevieille. His wife put her hand on his shoulder and looked at him, and he was quiet at once.

Jean le Rouge left the house on the hill at the end of January, and I was very sad.

I HAD no friends left now. I hardly recognized the farm any more. All these new people had made themselves quite at home there, and I seemed to myself to be a new-comer. The serving-woman looked at me with distrust, and the ploughman avoided talking to me. The servant's name was Adèle. All day long you could hear her grumbling and dragging her wooden shoes after her as she walked. She made a noise even when she was walking on straw. She used to eat her meals standing, and answer her master and mistress quite rudely.

M. Alphonse had taken away the bench which was by the door, and had put up little green bushes with trellis-work round them. He cut down the old elm tree, too, to which the wood owl used to come on summer evenings.

Of course the old tree had not shaded the house for a long time. It only had one tuft of leaves right up on the top. It looked like a head which bent over to listen to what people underneath were saying. The woodcutters

who came to cut it down said that it would not be an easy thing to do. They said there was some danger that when it fell it would crash through the roof of the house.

At last, after a lot of talk, they decided to rope it round and pull it over so that it fell on to the dung-heap. It took two men all day to cut it down, and just when we thought that it was going to drop nicely, one of the ropes worked loose, and the old elm jumped and fell to one side. It slipped down the roof, knocking down a chimney and a large number of tiles, bumped a piece out of the wall, and fell right across the door. Not one of its branches touched the dung-heap. M. Alphonse yelled with rage. He laid hold of the axe belonging to one of the woodcutters, and struck the tree so violent a blow that a piece of bark flew against the linen-room window and broke a pane.

Madame Alphonse saw the bits of glass fall on me. She jumped up in more excitement than I had ever seen her show, and with trembling hands and fearful eyes she examined closely every bit of the table-cloth which I was embroidering. But she did not see me wiping away the blood from my cheek which had been cut by a bit of glass. She was so

afraid that something might happen to the piles of linen which were beginning to grow that she took me off next day to her mother's to show me how linen should be put into closets.

MADAME ALPHONSE'S mother was called Madame Deslois, but when the ploughmen talked about her they always said "the good woman of the castle." She had only been to Villevieille once. She had come close up to me and looked at me with her eyes half shut. She was a big woman who walked bent double as if she were looking for something on the ground. She lived in a big house called the Lost Ford.

Madame Alphonse took me along by a path near a little river. It was the end of March, and the meadows were already in flower. Madame Alphonse walked straight along the path, but I got a lot of pleasure out of walking in the soft grass.

We soon came to the wood where the wolf had taken my lamb. I had always had a mysterious fear of this wood, and when we left the path by the river to go through it I shook with fear. And yet the road was a broad one. It must even have been a carriage road, for there were deep ruts in it.

Above our heads heaps of pine needles

tickled one another and rustled. They made a gentle noise, not a bit like the whispering with silences in between, which I used to hear in the forest when the snow was on it. But in spite of all I could not help looking behind me. We didn't walk very far through the wood. The road turned to the left and we got to the courtyard of the Lost Ford immediately. The little river ran behind the stables as it did at Villevieille, but here the meadows were quite close together, and the buildings looked as though they were trying to hide among the sapling pines. The living house didn't look anything like the farms thereabouts. The ground floor was built of very thick old walls, and the first floor looked as though it had been put on top of them as a makeshift. The house did not look a bit like a castle to me. It made me think of an old tree trunk out of which a baby tree had sprouted, and sprouted badly.

Madame Deslois came to the door when she heard us arrive. She winked her little eyes as she looked at me and said at once in a loud voice that she had dropped a halfpenny in the straw, and that it was very funny that nobody had found it, as it had been lost for a week. While she spoke she moved her foot about and

stirred the straw which was in front of the door. Madame Alphonse cannot have heard her. Her big eyes were staring into the house, and she was almost excited when she said why we had come. Madame Deslois said that she would take me to the linen-room herself. She put the keys into the locks of the cupboards, and after having told me to be very careful, and to disarrange nothing, she left me alone.

It didn't take me long to open and close the great shining cupboards. I should have liked to go away at once. This big cold linen-room frightened me like a prison. My feet sounded on the tiles as though there were deep vaults underneath them. All of a sudden it seemed to me that I should never get out of this linen-room again. I listened to see whether I could hear any animals stirring, but I only heard Madame Deslois's voice. It was a rough, strong voice which went right through the walls, and could be heard everywhere. I was going to the window so as to feel a little less lonely, when a door which I had not noticed suddenly opened behind me. I turned my head and saw a young man come in. He wore a long white smock and a grey cap. He stood standing as though he were

surprised to see anybody there, and I went on looking at him without being able to take my eyes away. He walked right across the linen-room, and he and I stared and stared at one another. Then he went out, banging himself against the woodwork of the door. A moment afterwards he passed by the window and our eyes met again. I felt quite uncomfortable, and without knowing why I went and shut the doors which he had left open.

Presently Madame Alphonse came and fetched me, and I went back to Villevieille with her.

Since M. Alphonse had taken Pauline's place I had got into the habit of going and sitting in a bush which had grown into the shape of a chair. It was in the middle of a shrubbery not far from the farm. Now that spring was beginning I used to go and sit there when the ploughmen were smoking their pipes at the stable doors. I used to sit there listening to the little noises of the evening, and I longed to be like the trees. That evening I thought of the man I had seen at Lost Ford. But every time I tried to remember the exact colour of his eyes they pierced into my own eyes so that they seemed to be lighting me all up inside.

THE next Sunday was Easter Sunday. Adèle had gone to mass in M. Alphonse's cart. I remained alone to look after the farm with one of the ploughmen. After luncheon the ploughman went to sleep on a heap of straw in front of the door, and I went to my shrubbery to spend the afternoon. I tried to hear the bells ringing, but the farm was too far from the villages round, and I could hear none of them.

I began to think about Sister Marie-Aimée, and my thoughts went back to Sophie, who used to come and wake me up every year so that I should hear all the bells ringing in Easter together. One year she didn't wake up. She was so upset at that that next year she put a big stone in her mouth to keep herself from sleeping. Every time she nodded off her teeth met on the stone, and she woke up.

I sat and thought about High Mass where Colette used to sing in her beautiful voice, and I could see our afternoon on the lawn,

and Sister Marie-Aimée busy with the special dinner which they gave us on feast days. And that evening when dinner time came I should see, instead of Sister Marie-Aimée's sweet loving face, Madame Alphonse's hard face and her husband's glittering eyes, which frightened me so. And as I sat and thought how long I should still have to stay on the farm I felt deeply discouraged.

When I was tired of crying I saw with astonishment that the sun was quite low. Through the branches of my shrubbery I watched the long thin shadows of the poplar trees growing longer than ever on the grass, and quite close to me I saw a long shadow which was moving. It came forward, then stopped, and then came forward again. I understood at once that somebody was going to pass my hiding-place, and almost immediately the man in the white smock walked into the shrubbery, stooping to get out of the way of the branches. I felt cold all over. I soon got control of myself, but I could not help trembling nervously. He remained standing in front of me without saying a word. I sat and looked at his eyes, which were very gentle, and began to feel warm again. I noticed that, as Eugène used to, he wore a col-

oured shirt and a cravat tied under the collar, and when he spoke it seemed to me that I had known his voice for a long time. He leaned against a big branch opposite me, and asked me if I had no relations. I said "No." His eye ran along the branch covered with young shoots, and without looking at me he said again, "Then you are all alone in the world." I answered quickly, "Oh no, I have Sister Marie-Aimée!" And without leaving him time to ask any more questions I told him how I had longed for her, and how impatiently I was waiting and hoping to see her again. Talking about her made me so happy that I could not stop talking. I told him of her beauty and of her intelligence, which seemed to me to be above everything in the world. I told him, too, how sorry she had been when I went away, and of the joy that I knew she would feel when she saw me come back.

While I talked his eyes were fixed on my face, but they seemed to look much further. After a silence he asked again, "Have you no friends here?" "No," I said; "all those whom I loved have gone"; and I added rather angrily, "They have even turned out Jean le Rouge." "And yet," he said "Madame Alphonse is not unkind?" I told him that she

was neither unkind nor kind, and that I should leave her without any regret.

Then we heard the sound of M. Alphonse's cart-wheels, and I got up to go. He stood aside a little to let me pass him, and I left him alone in the shrubbery.

That evening I took advantage of the unusually good humour of Adèle to ask her if she knew any of the ploughmen at the Lost Ford. She said she only knew some of the old ones, for since Madame Deslois had been a widow the new ones never stayed with her. A sort of fear which I could not have explained kept me from mentioning the young man in the white smock, and Adèle added with a wag of her chin: "Fortunately her eldest son has come back from Paris. The farm hands will be happier."

Next day while Madame Alphonse was working at her lace, I sewed and thought about the ploughman in the white smock. I could not in my mind help comparing him to Eugène. He spoke like Eugène did, and they seemed like one another somehow.

That evening I thought I saw him near the stables, and a moment later he came into the linen-room. His eyes just glanced at me and then he looked straight at Madame Alphonse.

He held his head high and the left side of his mouth dropped a little. Madame Alphonse said, in a happy voice, when she saw him, "Why, there's Henri!" and she let him kiss her on both cheeks, and told him to bring a chair up next to her. But he sat sideways on the table, pushing the linen to one side. Adèle came into the room, and Madame Alphonse said, "If you see my husband, tell him that my brother is here."

It was some minutes before I understood. Then I realized suddenly that the young man in the white smock was Madame Deslois's eldest son. A sense of shame which I had never felt before made me blush fiercely, and I was ever so sorry that I had spoken about Sister Marie-Aimée. I felt that I had thrown the thing that I loved best to the winds, and do what I could, I could not keep back two big tears which tickled the corners of my mouth and then fell on the linen napkin I was hemming. Henri Deslois remained sitting on the corner of the table for a long time. I could feel that he was looking at me, and his eyes were like a heavy weight which prevented me from lifting up my head.

TWO days afterwards I found him in the shrubbery. When I saw him sitting there my legs felt weak under me, and I stood still. He got up at once so that I should sit down; but I remained standing and looking at him. He had the same gentleness in his eyes that I had noticed the first time, and, as if he expected me to tell him another story, "Have you nothing to tell me this evening?" he asked. Words danced across my brain, but they did not seem to be worth speaking, and I shook my head to say no. He said, "I was your friend the other day." Recollection of what I had said the other day made me feel worse than ever, and I only said, "You are Madame Alphonse's brother." I left him and did not dare to go back to the shrubbery again. He often came back to Villevieille. I never used to look at him, but his voice always made me feel very uncomfortable.

SINCE Jean le Rouge had gone I had never known what to do with my time after mass. Every Sunday I used to pass the house on the hill. Sometimes I would look in through the gaps in the shutters, and when, as I sometimes did, I bumped my head, the noise it made used to frighten me. One Sunday I noticed that there was no lock on the door. I put my finger on the latch and the door fell open with a loud noise. I had not expected it to open so quickly, and I stood there longing to shut it and go away. Then as there was no more noise, and as the sun had streamed into the house making a big square of light, I made up my mind to go in, and went, after leaving the door open. The big fireplace was empty. There was no hook, there was no pot, and the big andirons had gone. The only things left in the room were the logs of wood which Jean le Rouge's children used as stools. The bark was worn off them, and the tops of them were polished, as if with wax, from the children sitting on them.

The second room was quite empty. There

were no tiles on the floor, and the feet of the beds had made little holes in the beaten earth. There was no lock to the other door either, and I went out into the garden. There were a few winter vegetables in the beds still, and the fruit trees were all in flower. Most of them were very old. Some of them looked like hunchbacks, and their branches bent towards the ground, as though they found that even the flowers were too heavy for them to carry. At the bottom of the garden the hill ran down to an immense plain where the cattle used to graze, and right at the end a row of poplars made a sort of barrier which kept the sky out of the meadow land. Little by little I recognized one place after another. There was a little river at the bottom of the hill. I could not see the water, but the willows looked as though they were standing on one side to let it pass. The river disappeared behind the buildings of Villevieille farm. There the roofs were of the same colour as the chestnut trees, and the river went on on the other side of them. Here and there I could see it shining between the poplar trees. Then it plunged into the great pine wood, which looked quite black, in which the Lost Ford was hidden. That was the road I had taken with Madame

Alphonse, when we went to her mother's house. Her brother must have come that way that day when he found me in the shrubbery. There was nobody on the road to-day. Everything was tender green, and I could see no white smock among the clumps of trees. I tried to see the shrubbery, but the farm hid it. Henri Deslois had been in the shrubbery several times since Easter. I could not have told how I knew that he was there, but on those days I could never prevent myself from walking round that way.

Yesterday Henri Deslois had come into the linen-room while I was there alone. He had opened his mouth as though he were going to talk to me. I had looked at him as I had done the first time, and he went away without saying anything. And now that I was in the open garden surrounded by broom in flower I longed to be able to live there always. There was a big apple tree leaning over me, dipping the end of its branches in the spring. The spring came out of the hollow trunk of a tree, and the overflow trickled in little brooks over the beds. This garden of flowers and clear water seemed to me to be the most beautiful garden in the world. And when I turned my head towards the house, which

stood open to the sunshine, I seemed to expect extraordinary people to come out of it. The house seemed full of mystery to me. Queer little sounds came out of it, and a few moments ago I thought that I had heard the same sound that Henri Deslois's feet made when he stepped into the linen-room at Villevieille.

I had been listening as though I expected to see him coming, but I had not heard his footstep again, and presently I noticed that the broom and the trees were making all kinds of mysterious sounds. I began to imagine that I was a little tree, and that the wind stirred me as it liked. The same fresh breeze which made the broom rock passed over my head and tangled my hair, and so as to do like the other tree did I stooped down and dipped my fingers in the clear waters of the spring.

Another sound made me look at the house again, and I was not in the least surprised when I saw Henri Deslois standing framed in the doorway. His head was bare, and his arms were swinging. He stepped out into the garden and looked far off into the plain. His hair was parted on the side, and was a little thin at the temples. He remained perfectly still for a long minute, then he turned

to me. There were only two trees between us. He took a step forward, took hold of the young tree in front of him with one hand, and the branches in flower made a bouquet over his head. It grew so light that I thought the bark of the trees was glittering, and every flower was shining. And in Henri Deslois's eyes there was so deep a gentleness that I went to him without any shame. He didn't move when I stopped in front of him. His face became whiter than his smock, and his lips quivered. He took my two hands and pressed them hard against his temples. Then he said very low, "I am like a miser who has found his treasure again." At that moment the bell of Sainte Montagne Church began to ring. The sound of the bell ran up the hillsides, and after resting over our heads for a moment ran on and died away in the distance.

The hours passed, the day grew older, and the cattle disappeared from the plain. A white mist rose from the little river, then a stone slipped behind the barrier of poplar trees, and the broom flowers began to grow darker. Henri Deslois went back towards the farm with me. He walked in front of me on the narrow path, and when he left me just before we came to the avenue of chestnut trees

I knew that I loved him even more than Sister Marie-Aimée.

The house on the hill became our house. Every Sunday I found Henri Deslois waiting there, and as I used to do when Jean le Rouge lived there, I took my blessed bread to the house on the hill after mass and we used to laugh as we divided it.

We both had the same kind of frolic of liberty which made us run races round the garden and wet our shoes in the brooklets from the spring. Henri Deslois used to say, "On Sundays I, too, am seventeen years old." Sometimes we would go for long walks in the woods which skirted the hill. Henri Deslois was never tired of hearing me talk about my childhood, and Sister Marie-Aimée. Sometimes we talked about Eugène, whom he knew. He used to say that he was one of those men whom one liked to have for a friend. I told him what a bad shepherdess I had been, and although I felt sure he would laugh at me, I told him the story of the sheep which was all swollen up. He didn't laugh. He put a finger on my forehead and said, "Love is the only thing that will cure that."

ONE day we stopped near an immense field of corn. It was so big that we could not see the end of it. Thousands of white butterflies were floating about over the corn-ears. Henri Deslois didn't speak, and I watched the ears of corn which were stooping and stretching as though they were getting ready to fly. It looked as though the butterflies were bringing them wings to help them, but it was no good for the corn-ears to get excited. They could not get away from the ground. I told my idea to Henri Deslois, who looked at the corn for a long time, and then, as though he were speaking to himself, and dragging the words out, he said, "It is much the same kind of thing with a man. Sometimes a woman comes to him. She looks like the white butterflies of the plain. He doesn't know whether she comes up from the earth or whether she comes down from the sky. He feels that with her he could live on the wind which passes, and the fresh young flowers. But like the root which holds the corn to earth a mysterious bond holds him to

his duty, which is as strong as the earth." I thought that his voice had an accent of suffering, and that the corners of his mouth drooped more than usual. But almost immediately his eyes looked into mine, and he said in a stronger voice, "We must have confidence in ourselves."

SUMMER passed and the Autumn, and in spite of the bad weather of December we could not make up our minds to leave the house on the hill. Henri Deslois used to bring books with him which we would read, sitting on the logs of wood in the back room which looked into the garden. I went back to the farm at nightfall, and Adèle, who thought I was spending my time dancing in the village, was always surprised that I looked so sad.

Almost every day Henri Deslois came to Villevieille. I could hear him from a long way off. He rode a great white mare which trotted heavily, and he rode her without saddle or bridle. She was a patient and gentle brute. Her master used to let her run loose in the yard while he went in to say "good day," to Madame Alphonse. As soon as M. Alphonse heard him, he would come into the linen-room. The two of them would speak of improvements on the farm or about people they knew. But there was always a word or a sentence in their conversation which came

straight to me from Henri Deslois. I often used to catch M. Alphonse looking at me, and I could not always keep from blushing.

One afternoon as Henri Deslois came into the room smiling, M. Alphonse said, "You know I have sold the house on the hill." The two men looked at one another. They both grew so pale that I was afraid they were going to die where they stood. Then M. Alphonse got out of his chair and stood leaning against the chimney-piece, while Henri Deslois went to the door and tried to close it. Madame Alphonse put her lace down on her knee and said, as though she were repeating a lesson, "The house was of no particular good, and I am very pleased that it has been sold." Henri Deslois came and stood by the table so close to me that he could have touched me. He said in a voice that was not quite firm, "I am sorry you have sold it without having mentioned it to me, for I intended to buy it." M. Alphonse wriggled like an earthworm. He made a great effort to laugh out loud, and as he laughed he said, "You would have bought it? You would have bought it? But what would you have done with it?" Henri Deslois put his hand on the back of my chair and answered, "I would have lived in it

as Jean le Rouge did." M. Alphonse walked up and down in front of the chimney. His face had changed into a yellow earthy colour. His hands were in his trouser pockets, and he picked up his feet so quickly that it looked as though he were pulling at them with a cord which he held in each hand. Then he came and leaned on the table opposite us, and looking at us one after the other with his glittering eyes, he bent forward and said, "Well, I have sold it now, so it's all over." During the silence which followed we could hear the white mare pawing the ground with her shoe as though she were calling her master. Henri Deslois went towards the door. Then he came back to me and picked up my work which had fallen from my hands without my having noticed it. He kissed his sister, and before he went he said, looking at me, "I shall see you to-morrow."

NEXT morning Madame Deslois came into the linen-room. She came straight to me, and was very rude. But M. Alphonse told her to be quiet, and, turning to me, he said, "Madame Alphonse has asked me to tell you that she would like to keep you in her service. But she wants you in future to come to mass with us." He tried to smile, and added, "We will drive you there and back." It was the first time that he had ever spoken directly to me. His voice was rather husky, as though he felt some awkwardness in saying these things to me. I don't know what made me think that he was lying, and that Madame Alphonse had not said anything of the kind. Besides, he looked so much like the Mother Superior that I could not help defying him. I told him that I didn't care about driving, and that I should go to mass at Sainte Montagne as before. He sucked in his lower lip and began biting it. Then Madame Deslois stepped forward threateningly, and told me that I was insolent. She kept on repeating this word as though she could not find any

others. She shouted it more and more loudly, and lost all control of herself. The white of her eyes was becoming quite red, and she raised her hand to strike me. I stepped back quickly behind my chair. Madame Deslois bumped into the chair and knocked it over, and caught at the table so as not to fall down. Her harsh voice terrified me. I wanted to leave the linen-room, but M. Alphonse had placed himself in front of the door, and I came back into the room and faced Madame Deslois across the table. She began to speak again in a strangled sort of voice. She used words which I didn't understand, but there was something about what she said and the way in which she said it which I hated. At last she stopped speaking, and shouted at the top of her voice, "I am his mother. Do you hear me?"

M. Alphonse came towards me. He took hold of my arm and said, "Come, now, listen to me." I shook myself loose, pushed him away and ran out of the house. The last words that Madame Deslois had said hammered on my brain as though they really were a hammer with one end of it pointed. "I am his mother, do you hear?—his mother." Oh, mother Marie-Aimée, how beautiful you were

when compared to this other mother, and how I loved you! How your many-coloured eyes beamed and lit up your black dress, and how pure your face was under your white cap! I could see you as clearly as though you were really in front of me.

I WAS quite astonished to find myself in front of the house on the hill, and when I got there I saw that snow was falling in a regular hurricane. I went into the house for shelter, and went straight into the room which looked out on the garden. I tried to think, but my ideas whirled round in my head like the snow-flakes, which looked as though they were climbing up from the ground and falling from the sky at the same time. And every time that I made an effort to think, the only things I could think of were little bits of a song which the children used to sing in the convent, and which ran—

The old girl jumped and jumped about
And jumped until she died.
The old girl jumped and jumped about
And jumped until she died.*

I felt less unhappy in this silent house. The softly falling snow was pretty, and the trees were as beautiful as on that day when I

* On a tant fait sauter la vieille,
Qu'elle est morte en sautillant,
Tireli,
Sautons, sautons, la vieille!

had seen them all in bloom. Then suddenly I remembered quite clearly all that had just happened. I saw Madame Deslois's hand with its square fingers, and shivered all over. What an ugly hand it was, and what a large one! Then I remembered the expression on M. Alphonse's face when he took hold of my arm, and I remembered as I thought of it that I had seen the same expression once before on a little girl's face. It was one day when I had picked up a pear which had fallen from the tree. She had rushed at me, saying, "Give me half of it, and I won't tell." I felt so disgusted at the idea of sharing it with her that, although Sister Marie-Aimée might have seen me, I had gone back to the tree and put the pear down where it had fallen.

Thinking of all these things, I longed and longed to see Sister Marie-Aimée again. I should have liked to have gone to her at once, but I remembered that Henri Deslois had said as he went, "I shall see you to-morrow." Perhaps he was at the farm already, waiting for me, and wondering what had become of me. I went out of the house to run back to Villevieille. I had only gone a few steps when I saw him coming up. The white mare

didn't find it very easy to climb the snow-covered path. Henri Deslois was bare-headed as he had been the first time he came. His smock billowed out with the wind, and he had a hand on the mane of the mare. The mare stood in front of me. Her master leaned down and took my two hands which I held up to him. There was on his face a harassed expression which I had never seen before. I noticed, too, that his eyebrows met, like those of Madame Deslois. He was a little out of breath and said, "I knew that I should find you here." He opened his mouth again, and I felt quite certain that his words were going to bring me happiness. He held my hands tighter, and said in the same breathless voice as before, "Don't hate me." Turning his eyes away from mine he added, "I can no longer be your friend." I thought that somebody had struck me a violent blow on the head. There was a noise of a saw in my ears. I could see Henri Deslois trembling, and I heard him say, "How cold I am!" Then I no longer felt the warmth of his hand on mine. And when I realized that I was standing all alone in the path, I saw nothing but a great white shape which was slipping noisily across the snow.

I WENT slowly down the other side of the hill, walking in the snow, which squeaked under my feet. About halfway a peasant offered me a lift in his cart. He was going to town too, and it was not long before we got to the Orphanage. I rang the bell, and the porteress looked out at me through the peep-hole. I recognized her. It was "Ox Eye" still. We had named her Ox Eye because her eyes were big and round like a daisy. She opened the gate when she recognized me, and told me to come in; but before she shut the gate behind me she said, "Sister Marie-Aimée is not here." I didn't answer, so she said again, "Sister Marie-Aimée is not here." I heard what she said quite well, but I didn't pay any attention to it. It was like a dream where the most extraordinary things happen without seeming to be of any importance at all. I looked at her great big eyes and said, "I have come back." She closed the gate behind me and left me standing under the eaves of her little house in the gateway, while she went to tell

the Mother Superior. She came back, saying that the Mother Superior wanted to speak to Sister Désirée-des-Anges before she saw me.

A bell rang. Ox Eye got up and told me to go with her. It was snowing again. It was almost dark in the Mother Superior's room. At first I saw nothing but the fire, which was whistling and flaming. Then I heard the Mother Superior's voice. "So you have come back?" she said. I tried to think steadily, but I was not quite sure whether I had come back or not. She said "Sister Marie-Aimée is not here." I thought that my bad dream was coming on again, and coughed to try and wake myself. Then I looked at the fire and tried to find out why it whistled like that. The Mother Superior spoke again. "Are you ill?" she said. I answered "No." The heat did me good, and I felt better. I was beginning to understand at last that I had come back to the Orphanage, and that I was in the Mother Superior's room. My eyes met hers, and I remembered everything. She laughed a little, and said, "You have not changed much. How old are you now?" I told her that I was eighteen years old. "Really," she said. "Going out into the

world has not made you grow much." She leaned one elbow on the table, and asked me why I had come back. I wanted to tell her that I had come back to see Sister Marie-Aimée, but I was afraid of hearing her say once more that Sister Marie-Aimée was not there, and I remained silent. She opened a drawer, took out a letter, which she covered with her open hand, and said in the weary voice of a person who has been bothered unnecessarily, "This letter had already told me that you had become a bold, proud girl." She pushed the letter from her as though she were tired, and in a long breath she said, "You can work in the kitchen here until we find you something else to do." The fire went on whistling. I went on looking at it, but I could not make out which of the three logs was making the noise. The Mother Superior raised her monotonous voice to draw my attention. She warned me that Sister Désirée-des-Anges would watch me very closely, and that I should not be allowed to talk to my former companions. I saw her point to the door, and I went out into the snow.

On the other side of the yard I could see the kitchens. Sister Désirée-des-Anges, who was tall and slim, was waiting for me at the

door. I could see nothing of her but her cap and her black dress, and I imagined her to be old and withered. I thought of running away. I need only run to the gate and tell Ox Eye that I had come on a visit. She would let me out, and that would be all.

Instead of going to the gate I went towards the buildings where I had lived when I was a child. I didn't know why I went there, but I could not help it. I felt very tired, and I should have liked to lie down and sleep for a long time.

The old bench was in the same place. I wiped some of the snow off it with my hands, and sat down leaning against the linden tree as M. le Curé used to do. I was waiting for something, and I didn't know what. I looked up at the window of Sister Marie-Aimée's room. The pretty embroidered curtains were no longer there, and although the window was just like the other windows now, I thought it quite different. And though the thick calico curtains were the same in this room as in the others, they seemed to me to make that window look like a face with its eyes shut.

The yard began to get dark, and the lights lit up the rooms inside. I meant to get up

from the bench, thinking, "Ox Eye will open the gate for me"; but my body felt crushed, and I seemed to have two broad, hard hands weighing heavily on my head. And, as though I had spoken them aloud, the words, "Ox Eye will open the gate for me," repeated themselves over and over again. All of a sudden a voice with pity in it said quite close to me, "Please, Marie-Claire, don't sit out here in the snow." I raised my head, and standing in front of me was a young, quite young, sister, whose face was so beautiful that I could not remember ever to have seen such a face before. She bent over me to help me up, and, as I could hardly stand upright, she put my arm under hers, and said, "Lean on me." Then I saw that she was taking me to the kitchen, the great glass door of which was bright with light. I didn't think of anything. The snow pricked my face, and my eyelids were burning. When I went into the kitchen, I recognized the two girls who were standing by the big square oven. They were Veronique the Minx, and Mélanie the Plump, and I seemed to hear Sister Marie-Aimée talking to them by these names. Mélanie nodded to me as I passed her, and leaning on the young sister's arm, I went into a room in which there

was a night-light burning. The room was divided into two by a big white curtain. The young sister made me sit down on a chair, which she took from behind the curtain, and went out without saying a word. A little while afterwards Mélanie the Plump and Veronique the Minx came in to put clean sheets on the little iron bed beside me. When they had finished, Veronique, who had not looked at me at all till then, turned to me and said that nobody had ever thought that I should come back. She said it as though she were reproaching me for something shameful. Mélanie put her hands together under her chin, and put her head on one side, just as she used to do when she was a little girl. She smiled affectionately at me, and said, "I am very glad that you have been sent to the kitchen." Then she patted the bed, and said, "You are taking my place. I used to sleep here." She pointed to the curtain, and in a low voice she said, "This is where Sister Désirée-des-Anges sleeps." When they had gone out, closing the door behind them, I sat closer to the bed. The big white curtain made me feel uncomfortable. I thought I could see shadows moving in the folds which the night-light left in darkness. Then I

heard the dinner-bell. I recognized it, and without knowing what I was doing I counted the strokes. Everything was quite still for some time, and then the young sister came into the room bringing me a bowl of steaming soup. She pulled the big curtain back and said, "This is your room, and that is mine." I felt quite reassured when I saw that her little iron bedstead was exactly the same as my own. I began to wonder whether she was Sister Désirée-des-Anges, but I dared not believe it, and asked her. She nodded "Yes," and drawing her chair close to mine, she put her face in the full light and said, "Don't you recognize me?" I looked at her without answering. No, I didn't recognize her. In fact, I was certain that I had never seen her; for I was certain that one could never forget her face if one had seen it once. She made a funny little grimace, and said, "I can see you don't remember poor Désirée Joly." Désirée Joly? Of course I remembered her. She was a girl who had become a novice. Her face was rosier than roses. She had a beautiful, slim figure, and used to laugh all day long. We all loved her. She used to jump about so when she played with us that Sister Marie-Aimée often used to say to her, "Come

now, come now, not so high, please, Mademoiselle Joly! You are showing your knees!" Even now, when I was looking at her, I could not remember her. She said "Yes, the dress makes a lot of difference." She pulled up her sleeves, and making the same funny little face again, she said, "Forget that I am Sister Désirée-des-Anges, and remember that Désirée Joly used to be very fond of you." Then she went on quickly, "I recognized you at once," she said. "You still have the same baby face." When I told her I had imagined Sister Désirée-des-Anges to be old and cross, she answered, "We were both wrong. I had been told that you were vain and proud; but when I saw you crying in the middle of the snow, I thought only that you were suffering, and I went to you." When she had helped me to bed, she divided the room again with the curtain, and I went to sleep at once.

But I didn't sleep well. I woke up every minute. There was a heavy stone on my chest still, and when I managed to throw it off, it split up into several pieces, which fell back on me and crushed my limbs. Then I dreamed that I was on a road full of sharp pointed stones which cut me. I walked along it with difficulty. On both sides of the road there were fields, vines and houses. All the

houses were covered with snow, but the trees were laden with fruit, and were in bright sunshine. I left the road and went into the fields, stopping at all the trees to taste the fruit. But all the fruit was bitter, and I threw it away. I tried to go into the snow-covered houses, but they had no doors. I went back on to the road and the stones gathered round me so fast that I could not go on. Then I called for help. I called as loud as I could, but nobody heard me. And when I felt I was going to be buried under a huge heap of stones, I struggled so hard to get away from them that I woke myself up. For a moment I thought I was still dreaming. The ceiling of the room seemed to be a tremendous height. The rod from which the white curtain was hanging glittered here and there, and the branch of boxwood which was nailed to the wall threw a shadow on the statue of the Virgin which was in the corner. Then a cock crowed. He crowed several times, as though he wanted to make me forget his first crow, which had stopped short, as if he were in pain. The night-light began to flicker. It sputtered for a long time before it went out, and when the room was quite dark I heard Sister Désirée-des-Anges breathing gently and regularly.

LONG before daybreak I got up to begin my work in the kitchen. Mélanie showed me how to lift the big coppers. It was a matter of skill as well as of strength. It took me more than a week before I could even move one of them. Mélanie taught me how to ring the heavy waking bell. She showed me how to put my shoulders into the work so as to pull the rope, and I soon got into the way of it. And every morning, whether it were cold or raining, I used to enjoy ringing the bell. It had a clear sound which the wind increased or lessened, and I never got tired of hearing it. There were days when I rang so long that Sister Désirée-des-Anges would open her window and would say pleadingly, "That'll do, that'll do."

Since I had come to the kitchen, Veronique the Minx used to look away from me when she spoke, and if I asked her where anything was, she would point to it without speaking. Sister Désirée-des-Anges used to watch her, and would curl her lip as she watched. She

was not as quick-tempered as she used to be when she was a novice, but she was full of life still and full of fun. Every evening we used to meet in our room, and she would make me laugh at her remarks at what had been going on during the day. Sometimes my laughter ended in a sob. Then she used to put her hands together as the saints do in the pictures, raise her eyes and say, "Oh, how I wish that your sorrow would leave you." Then she would kneel on the ground and pray, and I often used to go to sleep before she got up again.

Work in the kitchen was very hard. I used to help Mélanie polish up the coppers, and wash the tiled floors. She did most of the work herself. She was as strong as a man, and was always ready to help me. As soon as she found that I was tired, she used to force me to sit down on a chair, and would say smilingly, "Recreation time." A few days after I had arrived, she reminded me of the difficulties she used to have in learning her catechism.

She had not forgotten that during a whole season I had spent all my recreation time trying to teach her to learn it by heart. And now she delighted in making me rest.

Veronique's work was the preparation of the vegetables, and she also took the meat in from the butcher. She used to stand stiffly by the scales until the butcher's boys put the meat on. She was always grumbling at them, saying that the meat was cut too small or cut too big. The butcher boys used to get angry with her and were rude to her sometimes, and Sister Désirée-des-Anges told me at last to take the meat in instead of her. She came to the scales just the same next day; but I was there with Sister Désirée-des-Anges, who was telling me how to weigh the meat.

ONE morning one of the two butchers looked at me and spoke my name. Sister Désirée-des-Anges and I looked at the butcher boy in surprise. He was a new one, but I soon recognized him. He was the eldest son of Jean le Rouge. He was delighted to see me again, and told me that his parents had got a good place at the Lost Ford. He himself didn't care about working in the fields, and had found work with a butcher in the town. Then he told me that the Lost Ford was quite near Villevieille, and asked me if I knew it. I nodded my head to say that I did. He went on to say that his father and mother had been there for some months, and that there had been feasting there last week because Henri Deslois was married. I heard him say a few words more which I didn't understand, then the daylight in the kitchen turned into black night, and I felt the tiles give way under my feet and drag me down into a bottomless hole. I remember Sister Désirée-des-Anges coming to help me, but an animal had fastened itself on my chest.

It made a dreadful sound which it hurt me to hear. It was like a horrible sob which always stopped at the same place. Then the light came back again, and I could see above me the faces of Sister Désirée-des-Anges and Mélanie. Both were smiling anxiously, and Mélanie's broad, red face looked like Sister Désirée-des-Anges's pointed pale one. I sat up in bed, wondering why I was there by daylight, but I didn't get up. I remembered little Jean le Rouge, and for hours and hours I fought with my pain.

When Sister Désirée-des-Anges came into the room at bedtime she sat down on the foot of my bed. She put her two hands together like the saints did. "Tell me of your sorrow," she said. I told her, and it seemed to me that every word I spoke took some of my suffering away with it.

When I had told her everything, Sister Désirée-des-Anges fetched "The Imitation of Jesus Christ," and began to read aloud. She read in a gentle and resigned voice, and there were words which sounded like the end of a moan.

On the days which followed, I saw little Jean le Rouge again. He told me some more about the Lost Ford, and while he said how

happy his parents were and how kind the master was to them, I could see the house on the hill with its garden in flower, and its spring from which the little brooklets crawled down to the river, hiding themselves under the broom. I often spoke of it to Sister Désirée-des-Anges, who listened to me meditatively. She knew the neighbourhood and every corner of the place, and one evening, when she sat dreaming and I asked her what she was thinking about, she said, "Summer will be over soon, and I was thinking that the trees were full of fruit."

DURING the month of September a number of nuns paid visits to the Mother Superior. Ox Eye used to ring the bell to announce them. Every time she rang Veronique went out to see who was coming in. She always had something disagreeable to say about each one of the sisters whom she recognized. One evening the bell sounded. Veronique, who was looking out, said, "Well, here's one whom nobody expected." She put her head into the kitchen again, and said, "It is Sister Marie-Aimée." The big spoon which I had in my hand slipped through my fingers and dropped into the copper. I rushed to the door, pushing past Veronique, who wanted to keep me back. Mélanie rushed after me. "Don't," she said, "the Mother Superior can see you." But I rushed out to Sister Marie-Aimée. I rushed into her arms with such force that we nearly fell over together. She clasped me tight and held me. She was trembling and almost crazy with joy. She took my head in her hands, and, as if I had been quite a little child,

she kissed me all over my face. Her stiff linen cap made a noise like paper when you crumple it up, and her broad sleeves fell back to her shoulders. Mélanie was right, the Mother Superior saw me. She came out of the chapel and came towards us. Sister Marie-Aimée saw her. She stopped kissing me, and put her hand on my shoulder. I put my arm round her, fearing that she would be taken away from me, and the two of us stood and watched the Mother Superior. She passed in front of us without raising her eyes, and didn't seem to see Sister Marie-Aimée, who bowed gravely to her.

As soon as she had gone I dragged Sister Marie-Aimée off to the old bench. She stopped a moment, and before sitting down she said, "It is as though things were waiting for us." She sat down. She leaned against the linden tree, and I kneeled down in the grass at her feet. There were no more rays in her eyes. It was as though the colours in them had all been mixed together. Her dear little face had grown smaller, and seemed to have gone further back into her cap. Her stomacher had not the beautiful curve on her breast that it used to have, and her hands were so thin that the blue veins in them

showed up quite clearly. She hardly glanced at the window of her room, but looked out on the linden trees and round the courtyard, and as she caught sight of the Mother Superior's house, these words fell from her like a sigh, "We must forgive others if we wish to be forgiven." Then she looked at me again, and said, "Your eyes are sad." She passed the palms of her hands over my eyes, as if she wanted to wipe out something which displeased her, and, keeping them there so that my eyes remained shut, "How we suffer," she said. Then she took her hands away and clasped mine, and, with her eyes on my face, she said, as though she were praying, "My sweet daughter, listen to me. Never become a poor nun." She heaved a long sigh of regret, and said, "Our dress of black and white tells others that we are creatures of strength and of brightness. At our bidding all tears are dried, and all who suffer come to us for consolation, but nobody thinks of our own suffering. We are like women without faces." Then she spoke of the future. She said, "I am going where the missionaries go. I shall live there in a house full of terror. Before my eyes will pass unceasingly everything that is hideous, everything that is ugly, everything

that is bad." I listened to her deep voice. There was a note of passion in it. It was as though she were taking on to her shoulders all the suffering of the world. Her fingers loosed mine. She passed them over my cheeks, and speaking very gently, said, "The purity of your face will always remain graven on my mind." Then she looked out, away and past me, and added, "God has given us remembrance, and it is not in anybody's power to take that away from us." She got up from the bench. I went with her across the yard, and when Ox Eye had closed the heavy gate behind her, I stood and listened to the echo of its closing.

That evening Sister Désirée-des-Anges came into the room later than usual. She had been taking part in special prayer for Sister Marie-Aimée, who was going away to nurse the lepers.

WINTER came again. Sister Désirée-des-Anges had soon guessed my love of reading, and she brought me all the books in the sisters' library, one after the other. Most of the books were childish books, and I read quickly, turning over several pages at a time. I preferred stories of travel, and I used to read at night by the night-light. Sister Désirée-des-Anges used to scold me when she woke up; but as soon as she went to sleep I took up the book again. Little by little we became great friends. The white curtain was no longer drawn between our beds at night time. All sense of constraint had disappeared between us, and all our thoughts were in common. She was cheerful and bright always. The one thing that annoyed her in her life was her nun's costume. She found it heavy and uncomfortable, and she used to say that it hurt her. "When I dress," she said, "I always feel as though I were putting myself into a house where it is always night." She was always glad to get out of her dress in the evening, and loved walking

about the room in her night-dress. She used to say, making that funny little face, "I am beginning to get used to it, but at first that cap crushed my cheeks and the dress weighed my shoulders down."

When the spring came she began to cough. She had a little dry cough which used to make itself heard from time to time. Her long slim body seemed to become more fragile than ever. She was as bright and cheerful as before, but she complained that her heavy dress became heavier and heavier.

ONE night in May she tossed about and dreamed aloud. I had been reading all night, and noticed all of a sudden that daylight was coming. I blew out the night-light and tried to sleep a little. I was just dropping off when Sister Désirée-des-Anges said, "Open the window, he is coming to-day." I thought that she was still dreaming, but she said again quite clearly, "Open the window that he may enter." I looked to see whether she was asleep, and saw that she was sitting up in bed. She had drawn back her blanket, and was untying the strings of her night-cap. She took it off and threw it to the foot of the bed. Then she shook her head, her short hair rolled into curls on her forehead, and I recognized Désirée Joly at once. I was a little bit frightened, and got up. She repeated, "Open the window that he may enter." I opened the window wide, and when I turned round Sister Désirée-des-Anges was holding out her clasped hands towards the rising sun, and in a voice which had suddenly grown weaker, she said, "I have

taken off my dress. I could not stand it any longer." She lay down quietly, and her face became quite motionless. I held my breath for a long time to listen to hers. Then I breathed hard, as though I could give her my breath, but when I looked at her more closely I saw that she had breathed her last. Her eyes were wide open, and seemed to be looking at a sunbeam which was coming towards her like a long arrow. Swallows flew past the window and flew back again, chirruping like little girls, and my ears were filled with sounds which I had never heard before. I looked up to the windows of the dormitories, hoping that somebody would hear what I had to say, but I saw nothing but the face of the big clock which seemed to be looking down into the room over the linden trees.

It was five o'clock. I pulled the blanket up over Sister Désirée-des-Anges and went out and rang the bell. I rang for a long time. The notes went far, far away. They went right away to where Sister Désirée-des-Anges had gone. I went on ringing because it seemed to me that the bells were telling the world that Sister Désirée-des-Anges was dead. I went on ringing, too, because I hoped that she would pop her beautiful face

out of the window and say, "That'll do, that'll do, Marie-Claire."

Mélanie pulled the rope out of my hands. The bell, which was up, fell back all wrong, and gave a sort of groan. "Silly, you have been ringing for a quarter of an hour or more," Mélanie said. I answered, "Sister Désirée-des-Anges is dead." Veronique went into the room after us. She noticed that the white curtain was not drawn between the two beds, and said that she thought it was disgraceful for a nun to let her hair be seen. Mélanie passed her finger over a tear which was rolling down each of her cheeks. Her head was more on one side than ever, and she whispered quite low, "She is even prettier than she was before." The sunshine bathed the bed, and covered the dead woman from head to foot.

I remained with her all day. Some of the sisters came to see her. One of them covered her face with a napkin, but as soon as she had gone, I uncovered it again. Mélanie came and spent the night by the bedside with me. When she had closed the window she lit the big lamp, "so that Sister Désirée-des-Anges should not be in the dark," she said.

A WEEK afterwards Ox Eye came to the kitchen. She told me to get ready to go the same day. In the hollow of her hand she held two gold pieces, which she put side by side on the corner of the oven, and, touching one after the other with her finger, she said, "Our Mother Superior sends you forty francs." I did not want to go away without saying good-bye to Colette and to Ismérie, whom I had often seen at the other side of the lawn; but Mélanie assured me that they didn't care for me any more. Colette could not understand why I was not married yet, and Ismérie could not forgive me for being so fond of Sister Marie-Aimée.

Mélanie went to the gate with me. As we passed the old bench, I saw that one of its legs was broken, and that one end of it had fallen into the grass. At the gate I found a woman waiting. Her eyes were hard. She said authoritatively, "I am your sister." I didn't recognize her. It was twelve years since I had seen her. Directly we got outside she caught hold of my arm, and in a voice

as hard as her eyes, she asked me how much money I had. I showed her the two gold pieces which I had just received. Then she said, "You will do better to remain in the town, where you will find it easier to get something to do." As we walked on she told me she was married to a gardener in the neighbourhood, and that she didn't intend to give herself any particular trouble over me. We got to the railway station. She took me on to the platform because she wanted me to help her carry some parcels. She said "goodbye" when her train went off, and I remained there and watched it go. Almost immediately another train stopped. The railway men ran up and down the platform calling to the passengers for Paris to cross over. In that one moment I saw Paris with its great houses like palaces, with roofs so high that they were lost in the clouds. A young man bumped into me. He stopped and said, "Are you going to Paris, mademoiselle?" I scarcely hesitated, and said, "Yes; but I have no ticket." He held out his hand. "Give me the money," he said, "and I will go and get it for you." I gave him one of my two gold coins, and he ran off. I put the ticket and the change in copper which he had

brought me into my pocket, went across the line with him, and climbed into the train.

The young man stood at the carriage door for a minute, and went off, turning back once as he went. His eyes were full of gentleness, like those of Henri Deslois.

The train whistled once, as though to warn me, and as it moved off it whistled a second time, a long whistle like a scream.

AFTERWORD

AND now may I tell you what I know about Marguerite Audoux, the author of the book you have just read? I know very little more of her than you do, for you have read the book, and Marguerite Audoux is Marie-Claire. If Marie-Claire in English does not please you, the fault is mine. I have tried hard to translate into English the uneducated, unspoilt purity of language, the purity of thought which are the characteristics of the French; but the task was no easy one, much as I loved it in the doing.

Marguerite Audoux herself is a plump and placid little woman, of about thirty-five. She lives in a sixth-floor garret in the Rue Leopold Robert, in Paris. From her window she has a view of roof-tops and the Montparnasse cemetery. When she learned of the success of her book, with which she had lived for six years, she cried. "I felt dreadfully frightened at first," she said. "I felt very uneasy. I felt as though I had become known too quickly, as though I were a criminal of note. Now my one wish is to work again."

She reads a good deal. Her favourite authors are Chateaubriand and Maeterlinck. In Maeterlinck she loves the mystery. "We never know people properly," she says. "They are just as difficult to understand as things that happen are. We never know whose fault it is when good or bad things happen, and we don't really know whether we ought to be angry or to be sorry with people who do harm. Wicked people are like a thunderstorm, don't you think? And a lazy woman is like a hot room. Both are unhealthy, but they cannot help it."

Marguerite Audoux does not say these things to be clever. She says them quite simply, and they express her natural way of thought, which is simplicity and purity itself.

She wrote her book when and how she could, on scraps of cheap paper, and she does not know herself now whether she hoped to have it published when she wrote it. She did hope for publication when she had finished it, but that was because she was hungry.

I met a friend just outside Marguerite Audoux's house after my first visit to her. "Tiens," he said, "tu viens de la mansarde de

Génie l'ouvrière." And the clever little pun was true. Marguerite Audoux is a genius, and she does not understand what people mean when they ask her "how" she "writes." She opens her weak eyes very wide at the question, laughs as a child laughs when it doesn't understand, and says, "But I don't know. The thoughts come, and I write them down. I only wish that I could spell them better."

When the committee of the Vie Heureuse was voting on her book before awarding her the £200 prize for the best book of the year, somebody suggested the possibility that she had had help with it. Madame Séverine was sent to fetch the manuscript. It was passed round, examined, and no more doubt was possible.

I hope you will find the pleasure in reading Marie-Claire that I found in translating it. I should like to say quite earnestly—and perhaps a little shamefacedly, because we hate saying these things out loud—that when I had read it I felt awed. The book had worked upon me. Do you remember the impression of moonlight upon the snow in the country? You must be quite alone to feel it. The purity of it all makes you wish that you were a cleaner man or woman, and, till you

rub shoulders with people again, you mean to try hard to be cleaner and better. Marie-Claire made me feel just exactly like that.

JOHN N. RAPHAEL.

M. of T.
O. 1.14.